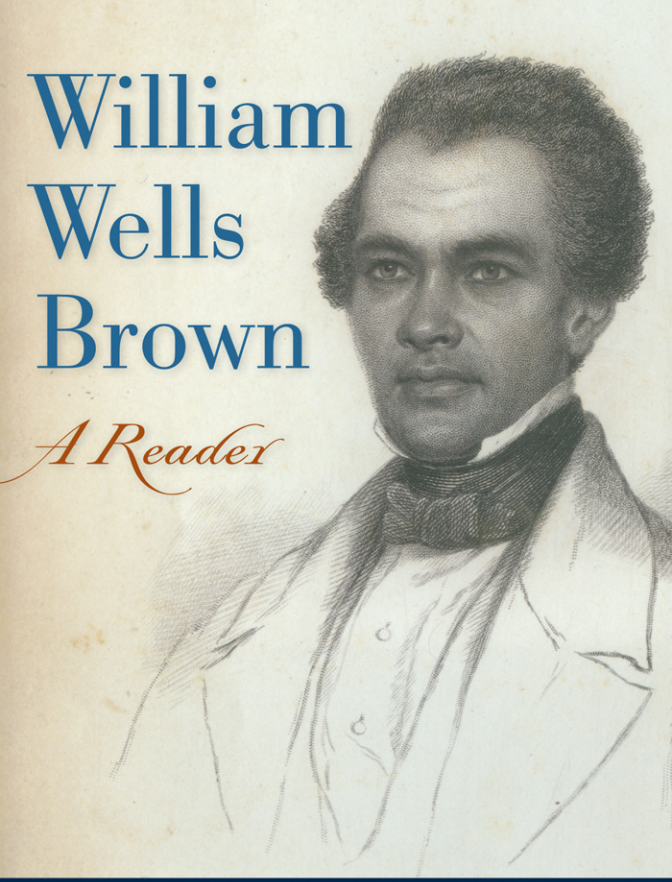
William Wells Brown

A Reader



EDITED BY Ezra Greenspan

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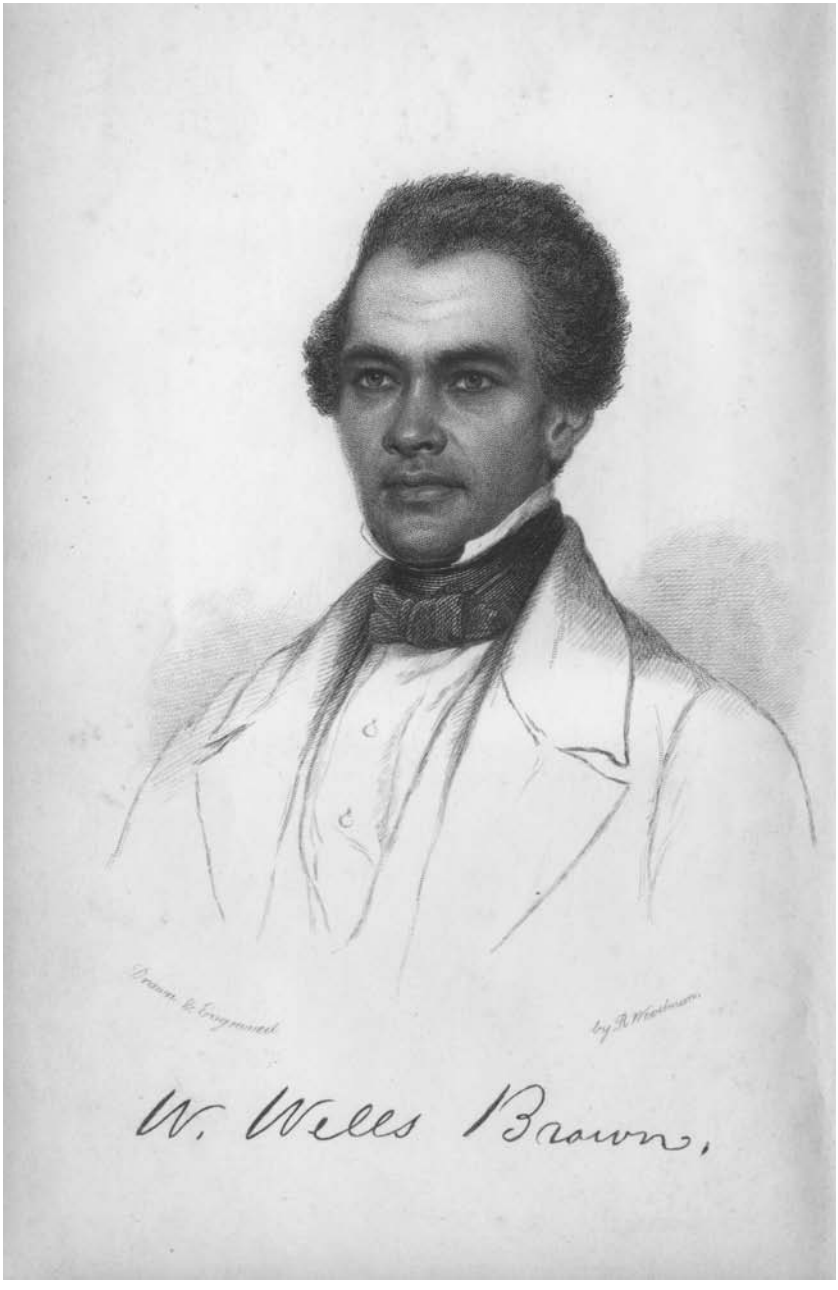
Drawn & Engraved
by R. Woodman
W. Wells Brown.

William Wells Brown

A READER

EDITED BY EZRA GREENSPAN

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INTRODUCTION

The literary career of William Wells Brown (1814–84) is one of the most extraordinary in nineteenth-century American literature. Born into slavery on a Kentucky farm, passed from owner to owner, and kept functionally illiterate until after he escaped to freedom at age nineteen, Brown became the most widely published, broadly pioneering African American writer of his century. Like many of his African American peers in the antislavery movement, Brown wrote extensively for the journalistic press, but among their major contemporaries only he and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper also pursued a consistent, lifelong commitment to the writing of books. During a career of more than four decades' duration, Brown was active across most of the established literary genres of his time: polemic, autobiography, biography, fiction, travel, drama, poetry, and history. He oversaw the publication of more than a dozen books, several edited or compiled but the majority "written by himself," the tag phrase amounting to a badge of identity required for authentication of African American authorship. Brown allowed the attachment of that tag as a subtitle to his first book (*Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*) but soon thereafter discarded it in favor of the byline "by the author of." He engaged in a variety of the chief nineteenth-century modes of publication, bringing out his books on standard terms with commercial publishers, through arrangement with antislavery societies, or, in the case of his last two books, through self-publication. Most of his books were published originally in the United States, but others appeared first in England, and some were published in both countries. Furthermore, he saw nearly all these books through multiple printings and/or editions. He published his novel, *Clotel*, for instance, in four different versions with four different publishers during a fifteen-year period, and he brought out his popular slave narrative in various editions in the United States and Great

Britain, with sales probably in the several tens of thousands. One additional edition, probably unauthorized, appeared in Holland in translation.

Even an abbreviated list of his literary accomplishments demonstrates his singularity among nineteenth-century African American writers. He was the author of the first African American novel (*Clotel*), the first published African American play (*The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom*), the first African American European travelogue (*Three Years in Europe*), and the first history of African American military service in the Civil War (*The Negro in the American Rebellion*). In addition, he wrote two more books that contributed to his status as a pioneering historian in the nascent fields of African American and pan-African history. He was the author as well of one of the single most historically important and literarily accomplished fugitive slave narratives (the aforementioned *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*), as well as of a striking array of additional self-narratives so compelling and shifting in content, form, and textual presentation as to make him second only to Frederick Douglass for preeminence among nineteenth-century African American autobiographers.

Who was this remarkable man? One simple response is to consider him as a talented member of a historic generation that included numerous important figures in American and African American literature. Despite the binding reality of racial difference caused by slavery in the South and by de facto segregation in the North, his generation of black and white Americans experienced a period of such dynamic changes in their political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances as to have constituted a revolution. A nation whose population was settled mostly to the east of Brown's Kentucky birthplace was transformed by the middle of their lives into a continental presence with a fast-spreading, ethnically diversifying population attracting immigrants in unprecedented numbers. Although the society had historically thought of itself as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant polity and culture, it was in fact rapidly becoming a remarkably polyglot society, as whole populations were annexed (Hispanics) or absorbed (immigrants), and others were transplanted (Native Americans) or reconfigured (African Americans). Even large portions of the most deeply rooted populations of the Northeast and Old South pulled up stakes and moved west. These large-scale population shifts

were facilitated by technological advances in transportation (steamboats and trains, roads and canals) that improved the speed, comfort, and efficiency of long-distance movement. Brown, a widely traveled man, frequently used his treatment on these new modes of transportation as a test of racial equality. Distances were likewise physically and culturally lessened by significant improvements in communications, brought about by such technological developments as the telegraph and the improved reproducibility of images (including the invention of photography), as well as emergent networks of print publications.

But nothing was simple about William Wells Brown, a black American born into slavery and self-emancipated into a life of exploration and a career as a pioneering literary professional. Limited in his ability to rely for support on the customary bulwarks of family, community, and education, he experienced with comparatively open exposure the sweeping changes transforming American society. His experience of these changes began even in his days in slavery, when, shifted from one workplace to the next, he labored for a succession of masters on the early steamships plying the Mississippi River. During a year of acute misery he worked for an unscrupulous slave trader named James Walker, who compelled the teenaged Brown to accompany him on trips across the Lower South to purchase slaves, assemble them in caravans, and prepare them for sale in the markets of Mississippi and Louisiana. Several years later, while working for a different master, Brown eventually made his way to freedom by stealing off a steamship transporting the master's family up the Ohio River. Between these and other assignments Brown also served for a short time as a handyman to the controversial antislavery editor Elijah Lovejoy, helping him to get his daily newspaper to its local St. Louis readership.

Even during his years in slavery Brown managed to slip through some of the social, intellectual, and geographical constraints typically imposed by slavery. Once liberated, he lived a life of broad horizons. During the years immediately following his escape, he repeatedly reenacted his own passage to freedom by serving as an agent on the last station of the Underground Railroad, helping to transport fellow fugitives by boat across Lake Erie to Canada. Upon discovering his rhetorical powers, he turned his primary at-

tention to work as an agent of the antislavery movement, lecturing tirelessly across the North for several decades for the immediate abolition of slavery. He also spread that message across the British Isles, where he lived and lectured from 1849 to 1854. On several occasions during the 1840s and 1850s he traveled as well to Canada and the Caribbean to inspect the conditions of black community life, and he reported subsequently on the relative virtues of black life in North America, the Caribbean, and Africa. During the Civil War, after overcoming his initial doubts that the war effort not only deserved but also required African American support, he argued publicly in printed works and in orations for its most vigorous prosecution. After Lincoln opened the way in 1863 to African American service in the Union army, Brown performed his part by actively recruiting young men for the new black units. After the war he spoke out for the broadest implementation of Reconstruction, whose workings he went down South on several occasions to observe and report on. Throughout this time he committed his observations, thoughts, and judgments to print.

A man with an exceptionally well-developed historical sensibility, Brown realized during the 1830s and 1840s that he belonged to a cohort of African Americans, whether born into freedom or slavery, who were experiencing seismic events that were shifting the foundations of nineteenth-century African American life. His remarkable generation included Henry Bibb, Alexander Crummell, Martin Robison Delany, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Harriet Jacobs, William Cooper Nell, Charles Lenox Remond, David Ruggles, William Still, and Harriet Tubman — all of whom he had dealings with and counted among his comrades. Singly and together they lived their lives as participants in and recorders of the transformative political events of the nineteenth century: the antislavery movement, the Civil War, and the revolution and counterrevolution of Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Despite their differences, sometimes heated, about tactics and policy, they were all active in the fight against slavery, segregation, and inequality.

That he was able to see himself as one among a cohort of black reformers was largely the result of a major development overtaking the lives of all Americans of their time: the emergence of a nationwide, print-based

culture whose products were relatively inexpensive, easily reproduced, and widely accessible. The developing infrastructure of print during the decades of Brown's early manhood made public speech possible for an increasing number of white and black writers alike and allowed individual names to circulate across time and space and to become widely recognizable. By no coincidence his birth cohort included pioneering figures of both American and African American writing. During his nearly forty years of residence in the Boston-Cambridge area, he became acquainted with the work of such white peers as John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Maria Child, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Bancroft, and Henry David Thoreau, whose writing came into public view during the same years and through some of the same print-based agencies as that of Brown and his black comrades. If recent scholarship has shown the considerable extent to which these white writers addressed contemporaneous racial issues in their work, Brown and his cohort needed no external guidance to see these facts plainly for themselves. In fact, Brown included polemical poems by Whittier in an anthology he compiled, incorporated an entire story by Child with slight changes into *Clotel*, read the white antislavery press on a daily basis, and for nearly two decades functioned as one of its most frequent contributors.

For this generation of African Americans, whose ancestors had previously had little access to printed matter of any sort, the consequences of access to letters were profound. They not only gained entry to plentiful information but were better able than any generation of their predecessors to see themselves as a generic grouping in the United States, with common backgrounds, folklore, and present needs. Such information became available to free blacks in most of the same formats as it became available to their white neighbors. The spread of the daily, weekly, and monthly newspaper and magazine press across the country in the pre–Civil War decades had its close parallel in the black community. The black press was born in 1827 with the founding of *Freedom's Journal*, a black-owned and -operated weekly newspaper in New York City that served as both a countervoice to the white racist press of the city and a positive voice for the needs of the city's black community. That paper was followed into existence in the pre–Civil War years by nearly three

dozen more papers owned and operated by blacks, including the *Coloured American*, *North Star*, *Provincial Freeman*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and the *Christian Recorder*. Those newspapers gave collective voice to a range of black opinions on the leading local, national, and international news of the day, some of general and some of specific interest to the black community. After the war black newspapers sprang up by the dozens across both the North and the South as black literacy and education proliferated.

A parallel development occurred in the magazine press. David Ruggles founded the first black magazine, *Mirror of Liberty*, in 1838 in New York City. Nearly a dozen more such magazines went into operation before the Civil War, but so few were the sources of advertising revenue, so limited the readership, and so difficult the general operating conditions that none survived it. Among the most important of the *Mirror*'s successors was Thomas Hamilton's short-lived but impressive *Anglo-African*, which during its fifteen-month run in 1859–60 published Martin Robison Delany's novel *Blake*, as well as other fine contributions by the era's expanding cadre of African American writers. Late in 1860 Hamilton began the serial publication in his *Weekly Anglo-African* of the second version of *Clotel*, now renamed *Miralda; or, the Beautiful Quadroon*.

Likewise, blacks gained greater—if hardly equal—access to the book press. Hundreds of fugitive slave narratives appeared in print in the United States during the antebellum years, and so did a more modest number of works of African American history, biography, nonfiction, and imaginative prose and verse. These works came for the most part off the presses of antislavery societies, local newspapers, and small printing offices. Although the terms of publication were still unequal, a few leading African American figures, such as Douglass, Brown, and, later in the century, Charles Chesnutt, could sometimes arrange for publication of their work with mainstream publishing houses and could do so on terms of standard royalties. An occasional African American, such as David Ruggles in New York City, could even find employment in the printing trade, but conditions remained discriminatory across the country, even in as relatively progressive a city as Brown's hometown of Boston. Two incidents there illustrated the precarious entry of African Americans into printing. While Brown's good friend William Cooper

Nell served an apprenticeship in the 1840s in the print shop of William Lloyd Garrison's antislavery *Liberator,* one white Bostonian responded with what must have been a widely accepted slur: "No nigger could learn the art of printing and it was held to be evidence of [Garrison's] arrogant folly to try the experiment."[1] A decade later, in an act of racial bigotry detailed in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Harriet Jacobs's teenaged son John was effectively driven away from his apprenticeship at a Boston printing office by his coworkers after they discovered that he was black.[2]

Brown was well aware of not only the discriminatory conditions of black authorship and printing but also the limitations on the spread of print in his community. The factors restricting its spread were both internal and external. Even among the free blacks of the North, he lamented, literacy levels were low and the benefits of print were unevenly spread. Down South, where he knew from personal experience that the Mason-Dixon Line served as a policed border to the free passage of printed matter as well as of black bodies, the situation was incomparably worse. It was common knowledge among his antislavery peers, for instance, that possession in many of the Southern states of David Walker's *Appeal,* an insurrectionary pamphlet self-published in Boston in 1829 and forerunner of the works of Brown's generation, was grounds for incarceration. Brown knew of many other works published in the North that were forbidden to the inhabitants of the South. In an 1860 speech he cited, for example, the notorious case of the Mobile bookseller who had been run out of town in 1856 for putting on his shelves a copy of Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom.*[3] The offending text might just as well have been *Narrative of William W. Brown* or any of a dozen other equally outspoken antislavery narratives.

Responding to repression with contempt, Brown operated as one among a growing number of black activists who took to print and the lecture circuit to argue the case for the abolition of slavery. Of all his comrades in the cause, the one with whom he had the most in common was Frederick Douglass. A comparison is instructive. Born on border-state farms to black slave mothers and unnamed white patrician fathers, raised in multiple locations dictated by the arbitrary workings of the slave system, separated repeatedly from their families, and deprived of access to most sources of information, both

Brown and Douglass felt the lash of slavery and carried its mark on body and mind for life. Their reactions during their more than half-century of freedom were broadly similar: They used their powers of mind and voice to argue incessantly against the institutionalized practices of slavery and racism. Both lectured widely on two continents, wrote polemically, and employed the power of the press to sway public opinion. If Douglass was the most eloquent and charismatic advocate of his people, Brown was the most imaginative and versatile, using his multiple talents to write, recite, orate, perform, sing, and debate his opposition to the physical, mental, and spiritual violation of his people. Both believed, moreover, that in so doing they were restoring the nation to its founding, race-blind ideals in the Declaration of Independence.

But William Wells Brown was also very much his own man and needs to be understood in his own striking individuality. He was a person of penetrating intelligence, vivid imagination, endless curiosity, irreverent temper, sharp wit, prickly sensitivity, and broad national and international experience; and his writings — nearly always inflected by an autobiographical habit of mind — expressed his pointedly idiosyncratic sense of life as an African American living a paradoxically free/not free existence and communicating his views to a racially mixed audience. His authorial speaking voice was distinctive. As the literary historian William Andrews has noted, Brown distinguished himself from most of his generation of African American fugitive slave narrators by willfully playing the role of the trickster, the man of guile who used his wits to maneuver through the straitened circumstances of slavery and inequality.[4] This was his strategy not just in his early *Narrative of William W. Brown* but in the succession of works he wrote in the decades that followed. As a practicing writer, Brown habitually functioned by countering established views and literary conventions with his own artfully modulated narratives. Whereas the white majority routinely labeled the black minority a problem, Brown took pleasure in reversing the formulation. In his Civil War–era history of African Americans, for example, he expressed his outrage at Abraham Lincoln's recent degradation of African American heritage by tracing genteel Anglo-Saxon status back to primitive tribal life and then circling around to connect that group's "low origin" to the president (see chapter 6).

An individual of ceaseless activity, Brown cultivated the habit of self-improvement common to many ambitious former slaves and immigrants. Sloughing off years of deprivation, he became an inveterate autodidact in the years following his emancipation. In one account that neatly epitomized his lifelong habit of study, he described how one night while living in London he noticed the neighboring church bells chiming at 2 A.M. while he was reading a four-volume biography of Pope Leo (see chapter 1). He read, as he wrote and lectured, voraciously. A contemporary critic (quite possibly Douglass) reviewing Brown's *The Black Man* commented with amazement on the range of Brown's knowledge of notable African Americans: "Whence has this man this knowledge? He seems to have read and remembered nearly every thing which has been written or said respecting the ability of the negro."[5] Exercising his retentive memory and extensive reading, Brown was able to assemble sketches of not only a wide array of other reformers then active in the United States, Caribbean, and Africa but also a skein of American forerunners that included Benjamin Banneker, Crispus Attucks, Phillis Wheatley, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner. Living at a time when U.S. borders were relatively unfixed, Brown maintained a global perspective not just on his native society but on the far-flung history and geography of people of African descent.

Attempting to pin a locality (Missourian, Bostonian, even American) on a person whose writings and views emanated from a life lived as expansively as Brown's yields limited results. Whereas Thoreau remarked on having "travelled a good deal in Concord," Brown roamed far and wide both in body and in mind. The same year (1854) in which Thoreau published his remark in *Walden*, Brown delivered a far-reaching address in London on the history of the slave revolution in Haiti, an oration he repeated in Philadelphia after his permanent return later that year from self-exile. One of the most deliberately provocative strategies of Brown's address was the juxtaposition of the Haitian and American revolutions and leaders; he observed, for example, that the career, "as a Christian, a statesman, and a general," of Toussaint L'Ouverture "will lose nothing by a comparison with that of Washington. . . . Toussaint liberated his countrymen; Washington enslaved a portion of his."[6] Whether addressing his words to audiences in London or Philadelphia, whether per-

forming as an orator or writer, Brown maintained a subject perspective that shifted easily between the national and the transnational. At times he seemed to speak from his own geographic location, at other times from identification with a transnational Africanness.

Either way, given the inescapable centrality of race in his life and era, Brown wrote from the position of a black man living in racially inscribed times. White pronouncements in the antebellum America of his youth about the nature, aptitude, and history of "the Negro" were typically as prejudicial as they were rife. More problematic yet, normative discursive positions were typically established by white racists and racialists. Although such pronouncements had long emanated from interested parties in both South and North, by the 1840s they began carrying the sanction of "science." These new ethnographic treatises, such as Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana; or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (1839) and George Gliddon and Josiah Nott's *Types of Mankind* (1854), argued the case for polygenetic origin of species and hierarchical classifications of human beings. Even such "friends of the Negro" as the author Harriet Beecher Stowe and the abolitionist (and, later, black Civil War regiment commander) Thomas Wentworth Higginson adopted some of the essentialist views about their black compatriots, if with a different application. The overriding problematic of communications in a society of race-dominated discourse was put well as early as the 1830s by the self-identified Native American writer William Apess, a man of mixed white, Native American, and quite possibly African American heritage, who threw back at his readers the "black inconsistency that you place before me — which is ten times blacker than any skin that you will find in the universe."[7] If anything, Apess complicated the question of "blackness" even beyond the binary level on which Brown and his peers generally framed issues of ethnicity and race.

Brown perceived the print culture of antebellum America as being as color coded as the society generally. Although endowed with the power of free speech, he perceived that he had little choice but to write in opposition to the prevailing views of the time. His statement in the preface to *The Black Man*, that he designed that book "to meet and refute" misrepresenta-

tions of his people, was an accurate articulation of the operating procedure he followed during the entirety of his career (see chapter 6). Although that writing posture was common to his cohort, his own oppositional posture was, no doubt, also profoundly personal in its origins. Brown bore knowingly in his own person and identity the Gordian knot of mixed black-white ancestry and used that knowledge as a basis of his writing. In his best work, such as *Narrative of William W. Brown* and *Clotel*, he unraveled its intricacies and complexities for all the reading public to see, transforming his personal agony into a compelling national drama containing within its folds the darkest psychosexual, genealogical secrets of American life. A writer as graspingly perceptive as Hawthorne or Faulkner of the binding tie between ancestry and identity, and comparably gifted in inventing a symbolic language of possession and appropriation, he relentlessly exposed that unseemly connection to the public eye, violating norms of decorum concerning correct familial, racial, and gender relations.

The literary art that Brown produced out of his mixed-race heritage has been well characterized by the literary critic Ann duCille as "'an 'unreal estate,' . . . an ideologically charged space, created by drawing together a variety of discursive fields — including 'the real' and the 'romantic,' the simple and the sensational, the allegorical and the historical — usually for decidedly political purposes."[8] A typical Brown text, whatever its generic definition, involves a messy, complicated mixture of discourses that transgresses the conventional lines between fiction and nonfiction, autobiography and generality, and print and orality — generally, for the purpose of effecting sociopolitical change. For this reason duCille's analysis pertains no less to his nonfictional than to his fictional writing. In all modes of writing he drew freely on elements from other genres: his fiction on orations, nonfiction, and journalistic elements; his historical works on journalistic accounts, personal anecdotes, songs, and fictional plot devices; his drama on antislavery lectures, minstrelsy, and contemporary theater — and all on his autobiography.

As a result, Brown's "unreal estate" drew for its content and rhetorical effects on a heap of miscellaneous materials: anecdotes, interviews, songs, stories, sermons, newspaper reports, magazine articles, legal compendia, controversial literature, and published books. He actively gathered these

materials in a seemingly indiscriminate manner approximating the practice of contemporary newspaper editors, who participated in a national exchange system of swapping their journals with fellow editors' from around the country. In this fashion all had access to a common pool of uncopyrighted, unrestricted printed information from which to draw in filling their publications, to one degree or another, with content. Given his unaffiliated, self-authorized position, Brown participated in this activity as a solo actor, extracting heavily from the common pool while also using his own imagination to rewrite texts, including his own, already in circulation. Even the most popular and fixed texts got a new accent when used by Brown, as when he recalibrated in *Clotel* Thomas Jefferson's semisacred definition of human rights as "life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness."[9] Likewise, even the most formulaic of character types (the virtuous female, protective male, pious minister) and plot outcomes (reward of virtue, happiness in marriage, and preservation of conventional nuclear family units) got altered in Brown's retellings.

Brown's works were an "unreal estate" in an additional sense not spoken by duCille: they treated the domain of public discourse as one to be cleared of proprietary fences by individuals. Such fences were going up across the United States, as entrepreneurs staked their individual claims to territory, real, commercial, or cultural. A similar development was transforming print culture into an inchoate industry subject to federal law and regulation. Writing at a time when publishers and authors were increasingly defending their proprietary rights to texts and invoking the protection of copyright, Brown was self-consciously engaged in undermining such restrictions. As a representative of a people whose personhood had been defined as property, Brown had a more complicated perspective on property rights than did most of his white literary peers.[10] It would be an interesting project to consider whether Brown consciously understood the ruling idea of property rights and real estate, which underlay the institution of slavery, as potentially a limitation on the cultural rights and domain of African Americans. Whatever the answer in theory, Brown in practice engaged repeatedly in verbal acts of violating the violator. As slavery violated black bodies, families, and customs, so he reciprocally violated white cultural norms and forms. If slavery institutionalized what abolitionists liked to call acts of "kidnapping," Brown

practiced an art that kidnapped in return. But this observation oversimplifies his broader authorial practice, because he also borrowed freely (and, on at least one occasion, documented in chapter 3, plagiarized) from the writings of other black writers whenever he saw good reason to do so. On some basic level Brown was ready to make free use of any and all writings and stories in circulation, white and black.

The hodgepodge contents and formal indeterminacy of Brown's writings — regardless of their generic definition as drama, fiction, history, or autobiography — have presented a stiff challenge to readers for 150 years. For most readers they still do. His writings have frequently earned the charge from critics that they suffer from disorganization, amateurism, and lack of talent. Had they passed into Henry James's field of vision — they apparently did not — they would presumably have been written off as "loose baggy monster[s]." But Brown's writings have as much internal logic and purposeful responsiveness to external conditions as do the discursive nineteenth-century Russian novels that prompted James's criticism. To read any or all of the works presented in this anthology, readers must open their minds to contentious, provocative, and exploratory modes of writing that crisscross generic boundaries, mix narrative discourses, shift narrative perspectives, and disregard formal and behavioral niceties. To cite one example of these practices, Brown blatantly mixed generic practices by interjecting into his prose memoir (*My Southern Home*) a dramatic interlude from a play (*The Escape*) that he published a generation earlier (see chapter 8).

Readers must be prepared, furthermore, to discern that these patterns do not end at the back cover of any particular volume but spill into the next and the next, making Brown seem like a writer as well suited to the dynamics of Internet textuality as to that of nineteenth-century printed literature. To a remarkable degree, careful readers will note, Brown's books interleaf. The most extreme instance of this phenomenon is his novel *Clotel*, which, with changes of plot and title, he brought out four times, each with a different publisher and different site or mode of publication, in a fifteen-year period. On a smaller scale he brought shorter pieces or anecdotes back to life as retellings in later books, such as the thrice-told story of mistaken racial identity that he crafted successively as drama, autobiography, and fiction

(see chapters 5, 7, and 8). Moreover, what he did with narrative elements he also performed with illustrations, recycling engravings and woodcuts in later books.

To encounter Brown is to meet African American writing at one of its formative moments and through the texts of one of its most inventive writers. He wrote in various regards from a mobile position on the border between black and white in his time and, as we can see today, between the emergent boundaries of African American and American literature. Part of the fascination with reading Brown today lies in watching a pioneering writer, working from nearly ground level with little situational vantage, construct a narrative literature of history, biography, fiction, and drama sufficient for the needs of his people—black and white. Another part is observing the corresponding phenomenon of that writer's self-fashioning, as he composed the text of his life as a man and writer by weaving between positions defined as white and black, lower and middle class, reformist and self-serving. Nineteenth-century African American literature offers few equally compelling oeuvres or lives.

His work and life raise a series of fascinating questions well worth our consideration. How did Brown see such contemporary activists at home and overseas as Douglass, Delany, and Crummell and such predecessors as Crispus Attucks, Nat Turner, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Madison Washington? Generations before Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, how did Brown respond to and sort out the competing ideologies of Afrocentrism, integration, and black nationalism? How is his personal story of the rise from slavery to literary prominence to be read, and what does its conflicted account of class status tell us about the continuing story of class, race, and education today? How did his debunking of the idea of racial purity challenge current views of ethnicity and race? What interpretation did he make of the Civil War, both during its occurrence and in its aftermath? How did he respond to the collapse of Reconstruction and the slide back to systematic segregation and inequality? What difference did he believe a single person could make in the reformation of society—and what difference the printed word? And, finally, to ask the overriding literary question, how are we to see him as a writer—as an American, an African American, and/

or a figure of the African diaspora — and where, accordingly, do we set our defining boundaries?

William Wells Brown: A Reader is designed to present one of the most historically and culturally significant African American writers to the current generation of readers. Well known in his own era, Brown disappeared from general view during the ebb period in the history of civil rights between the end of Reconstruction and the inception of the modern civil rights movement.[11] To this day he is far less visible than a writer of his quality and accomplishments deserves to be.

There is good reason for Brown's return to our full attention. He concerned himself with questions, problems, and issues that resonate in our own time. Racial equality, women's rights, literacy and education, class boundaries, and moral reform are as relevant in our era as in his, and it may well be that we can see and hear Brown more easily today than in times past. But Brown was not a prophet but a sentient, conflicted man trying to right the wrongs he saw around him by setting his thoughts into words, and it is best to understand him in his own terms before trying to translate his commentary on his era into one on our own. In the process we need to note this basic fact: Brown was a wonderfully inventive, entertaining storyteller with a rich imagination and keen powers of perception.

A sign of his fast-rising reputation is that, since the civil rights movement, most of Brown's individual works have trickled back into print in edited volumes or simple reprints, and various gatherings of his writings have begun to appear. There is good reason for this development. Brown was nearly always an interesting writer, and nearly all his works are compelling in their own right. But by contrast with figures such as Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, or Mark Twain, none of Brown's individual books stands conspicuously above the others. On the contrary, as I have already emphasized, his works blend into one another, each an outgrowth or offshoot of the others. For this reason, and also because of the generic breadth and variety of his books, I believe him to be a writer as profitably approached through the sum of the parts as through a reading of any one or two particular works.

Readers, I believe, will find that, with broadening acquaintance, he grows in their estimation.

I have designed this book to introduce Brown to contemporary readers in accordance with these views. Given Brown's remarkable productivity as a writer of books and his commitment to a career as an author, my editorial principle has been to respect the bibliographic integrity of his printed works by matching each of this book's chapters to one (or, in the case of chapter 1, two) of Brown's books. This compendium proffers readers a wide-ranging selection drawn from Brown's chief writings, all closely annotated and accompanied by introductory commentaries that connect Brown's work to his life, outline their composition and publication, and contextualize their significance against the literary, historical, and political conditions of the time. The contents of this collection span the full range of Brown's oeuvre: autobiography, polemic, fiction, travel, drama, history, and memoir. My criteria for selection, in descending order of importance, are literary and/or critical distinction, practical or theoretical relevance to the current generation, range of authorial interests and abilities, and readerly accessibility and legibility. Wherever possible, I have chosen books that can be reproduced in their entirety. Where not possible, I have chosen entire chapters that stand well on their own. In all cases I have sought to present the most compellingly significant and engaging of Brown's voluminous writings.

I have arranged the eight chapters of *William Wells Brown: A Reader* in chronological order from his first book to his last as a means of providing readers with the evolving sweep of his life and mind as they interacted with the fast-changing circumstances of his times. Each chapter presents a major printed work (or works) in a different genre. Chapter 1 presents the full texts of two versions of his fugitive slave narrative, which together provide different but complementary accounts of his life during and after slavery. Chapter 2 portrays him in the role of orator that he occupied for nearly two decades in the United States and Great Britain. The text comes from an abolitionist oration that he delivered to the women's antislavery society of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1847 just months after making his initial reputation with the publication of his fugitive slave narrative. Chapter 3 presents

a variety of the most striking episodes in the experience of a self-conscious African American in Great Britain as narrated in his impressive travelogue, *The American Fugitive in Europe*. Chapter 4 presents selections from his novel *Clotel*, which he wrote and published in England. Never published in the United States during his lifetime and for much of the twentieth century, *Clotel* is now widely regarded as part of the American literary canon. Chapter 5 shifts to his short-lived career as a stage writer–orator by reprinting the full text of his polemical antislavery play, *The Escape*, which Brown frequently recited from the abolitionist platform as a one-man performance in the late 1850s. Moving to the Civil War era, chapter 6 reprints excerpts from a variety of his biographical sketches, including those of Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass, in *The Black Man*, Brown's pioneering history of African Americans. Chapter 7 presents excerpts from *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, the earliest history of black service in the American Civil War. Finally, chapter 8 concludes the volume with excerpts from Brown's last book, *My Southern Home* (1880), which offers a retrospective-prospective summation of his era of African American life as seen from the vantage point of the end of Reconstruction.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Dean Jasper Neel and Dennis Foster, English Department chair, at Southern Methodist University for allowing me a sabbatical leave to concentrate my attention on this book. I would also like to thank John Ernest, Leon Jackson, Phil Lapsansky, and Robert Levine for responding knowledgeably to my questions. The book is the better for their shared expertise.

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Notes

1. The quote comes from James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton's *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 58.

2. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 186.

3. "Speech of Wm. Wells Brown," *Liberator*, October 26, 1860, 172. The person in question was William Strickland, the leading bookseller-publisher in Mobile. Strickland claimed in his defense, printed locally but written in New York City after he had run for his life, that he had ordered copies of Douglass's book and of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *A Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin"* (1853) for customers who had failed to pick them up. He made no defense whatsoever of the books' content or his right to sell antislavery material. A good discussion of the Strickland affair is given in Cathleen A. Baker, "The Press That Cotton Built: Printing in Mobile, Alabama, 1850–1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alabama, 2004), 131–40.

4. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 144–51.

5. The review appeared in *Frederick Douglass' Monthly* and was cited promotionally by Brown in the appendix to *The Black Man*.

6. William Wells Brown, *St. Domingo: Its Revolution and Its Patriots. A Lecture.* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855), 37.

7. William Apess, "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man" (1833), in *A Son of the Forest and Other Writings*, ed. Barry O'Connell (reprint; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 97.

8. Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.

9. Brown used the phrase as an epigraph to the novel's chapter 18 ("The Liberator"); see *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 159.

10. Ann Fabian is one of the few literary historians to examine this important issue; see her discussion of fugitive slave narration and property rights in *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 113–14.

11. During the era of segregation Brown remained a subject of interest to the small number of scholars, mostly African Americans, who continued to read and discuss the work of African American writers. Even among them, however, his individual works typically received faint praise rather than enthusiastic acclaim.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

No manuscripts or proof sheets for any of Brown's works are known to have survived. As a result, we can get no closer textually to Brown's intentions and wishes than by working from his original editions. Those nineteenth-century editions serve as the sources for all texts reprinted here.

My guiding editorial policy has been to reproduce Brown's works in a form that is as faithful as possible to the original texts, short of attempting to duplicate his texts typographically. For the most part I have limited my corrections to conspicuous printing errors.

Relevant printing and publishing information concerning Brown's original texts appears in the chapter introductions, and the bibliography begins with a list of his book-length publications.

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CHRONOLOGY OF BROWN'S LIFE AND CAREER

1814	Born into slavery on the farm of his master, Dr. John Young, near Lexington, Kentucky.
1816	Moves with his master and family to a farm in Missouri Territory.
1827	Moves with his master and family to St. Louis; hired out to various people during the next seven years.
1828–29	Hired out to a succession of St. Louis businessmen, including the alcoholic tavern keeper Major Freeland, who treats Brown so roughly that he flees into the woods outside the city before being hunted down by dogs, returned to Freeland, and severely whipped and smoked.
1830	Hired out to Elijah P. Lovejoy, the antislavery editor of the *Saint Louis Times*. Works for Lovejoy six months as an errand boy and all-purpose helper until beaten and disabled by a slave owner.
1830–31	Hired out to operator of steamship *Enterprise* with whom he travels on the Mississippi River. After several months is recalled and sent out to field labor on Young's plantation outside St. Louis, then is reassigned to his master's home as a house servant and coachman.
1832	Hired out to the slave trader James Walker for a year. Travels with Walker repeatedly along the Mississippi River and into interior, helping to assemble slave caravans and prepare slaves for sale in the markets of Natchez and New Orleans.

1833 Returns to service with Young in spring. Attempts to escape from slavery with his mother but is captured and returned to Young. Sent to hard labor in the fields before being sold to Samuel Willi, a St. Louis tailor. Hired out, in turn, by Willi to service on the steamship *Otto*. Sold by Willi in October to Enoch Price, a St. Louis merchant and steamboat owner.

1834 Escapes from slavery on New Year's Day near Cincinnati while accompanying Price's family on trip up the Ohio River. Is taken into safety in rural Ohio by a Quaker named Wells Brown, whose name he later adopts, before resuming his intended path to Canada by way of Cleveland. Alters his plan once in Cleveland, where he meets and marries Elizabeth Schooner.

1834–36 Works from his home base in Cleveland on various steamships ferrying fugitive slaves across Lake Erie to freedom in Canada.

1836 Moves with his wife to Buffalo, the family home until 1845. Birth of daughter, Clarissa (followed in 1839 by birth of Josephine).

1836–45 Works on various steamships on Lake Erie and becomes involved in local antislavery and temperance movements.

1840 Journeys to Caribbean to learn about the living conditions of local African diaspora populations.

1843 Attends and participates in the National Negro Convention held in Buffalo in July, at which he hears Henry Highland Garnet's incendiary speech, "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," and makes initial acquaintance of Frederick Douglass. Brown makes his first appearance in print with a letter about the convention published by the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. In fall accepts a position as a lecturer for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, for which he works until 1847.

1844 Attends the American Anti-Slavery Society convention held in New York City and makes his first speech at a national meeting.

1845 Moves to Farmington, New York, a town southeast of Rochester with a strong Quaker and antislavery presence.

1847 Separates from his wife and takes custody of their two daughters. Signs on to become an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and moves to Boston in May. Publishes his first two books, both in Boston with the Anti-Slavery Society: *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (in July) and *A Lecture delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem* (in December).

1848 Publishes an edition of antislavery songs, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, with the Boston antislavery publisher Bela Marsh. Is nearly killed during a riot at an antislavery gathering on Cape Cod, one of hundreds at which he spoke. Meets and befriends the recently escaped fugitives Ellen and William Craft in Bucks County, near Philadelphia, at year's end, and they plan a joint lecture tour.

1849 Lectures during the first half of the year both solely and jointly with the Crafts. In July sails from Boston to England, transporting with him the stereotype plates of *Narrative of William W. Brown* for reprinting in London (published in September). In August attends and addresses the international Peace Congress in Paris as a U.S. delegate. Delivers antislavery lectures across Great Britain and Ireland, as he will for the next five years.

1850 Publishes *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of an American Slave* in London and takes his paintings on tour across England and Scotland. Resolves to remain in the British Isles indefinitely following passage of the Fugitive Slave Act.

1851 Lectures in England and Scotland jointly with Ellen and William Craft, recent refugees (like Brown) following passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Visits the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in June with the Crafts and later publicly mocks its display of Hiram Powers's life-sized statue, *The Greek Slave*. Summons his daughters to England, later to France, for their education. His estranged wife dies toward year's end.

1852 Travels to France to spend time with his daughters and continues to speak and write against slavery. Publishes *Three Years in Europe* in London in September.

1853 Publishes *Clotel* in London in November.

1854 Receives manumission when English friends purchase his freedom from Enoch Price, and Brown embarks for the United States in September. Resettles in Boston and accepts a position as an agent of the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

1855 Serves as the featured speaker in January at the twenty-third annual Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society convention. Publishes in Boston *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots*, a lecture delivered the previous year in London and Philadelphia. Lectures across the northeastern and midwestern states both solely and jointly with his daughter Josephine, recently returned to the United States. Josephine's biography of her father is published in Boston in December.

1856 Writes (but does not publish) his first play, *Experience*, and gives numerous recitations of it on the antislavery lecture circuit.

1857 Lectures singly and jointly, with Susan B. Anthony, among others.

1858 Publishes his new play, *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom*, and gives numerous recitations of it on the antislavery lecture circuit.

1859 Publishes an abbreviated autobiography, *Memoir of William Wells Brown, an American Bondman, Written by Himself,* with the Boston Anti-Slavery Office.

1860 Marries Anna Elizabeth Gray of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in April and sets up house next door to her parents. Publishes serially an altered version of *Clotel* as *Miralda; or, the Beautiful Quadroon* in the (New York) *Weekly Anglo-American* (runs from December 1, 1860, to March 16, 1861).

1861 Lectures in Canada as a proponent of emigration to Haiti. Opposes military service by African Americans during the initial months of the Civil War.

1862 Names his newborn daughter Clotelle (d. 1870). Alters his political views and becomes an ardent supporter of the Union war effort.

1863 Reads publicly on New Year's Day the full text of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in Boston's Tremont Temple. Serves as a recruiting agent for the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry, one of the first African American units in the Union army, and continues to lecture widely in support of the war. Publishes *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements.*

1864 Publishes *Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States* (third version of *Clotel*) with the abolitionist James Redpath in his "Books for the Campfire Series" for Union soldiers. Brown goes on his last antislavery lecture tour in autumn.

1865 Begins practice of medicine, his primary occupation for the remainder of his life.

1867 Makes his first trip to Washington, D.C., to advocate erection of a freedman's memorial on Capitol Hill. Publishes two books with Shepard and Lee of Boston: *The Negro in the American*

Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity, and *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine* (fourth and last version of *Clotel*).

1870 Participates in the effort to found a temperance-based political party.

1871 Tours Kentucky to study school reform and temperance among freedmen; at one point is captured and held briefly by the Ku Klux Klan.

1873 Self-publishes *The Rising Son; or, The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race*, his third and last history of African Americans.

1874 Serves as the main speaker at the public memorial for Charles Sumner at Boston's Music Hall.

1877 Makes his first return to Great Britain since 1854 and lectures widely on temperance, a major cause of his later years.

1879–80 Tours the former slave states of Alabama, Tennessee, and Virginia.

1880 Self-publishes *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People*, his last book.

1884 Speaks in February at the public memorial for Wendell Phillips. Brown dies at home of bladder cancer on November 9 and is buried in Cambridge Cemetery.

William Wells Brown

A READER

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CHAPTER ONE

Writing Fugitive Slave Autobiography

In 1847 Brown joined the fast-growing ranks of his generation's fugitive slave autobiographers with his *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, the first of what would soon evolve into multiple versions of his life story. Of the dozens of slave narratives already then in circulation, the one that most directly and powerfully influenced his was Frederick Douglass's authoritative *Narrative of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), which years afterward Brown remembered as giving "a new impetus to the black man's literature."[1] Brown's similarly named text gave a further impetus to this historically and literarily significant African American genre. Vividly drawn, racily told, and bitingly perceptive, Brown's *Narrative* equaled not only the best works in that genre but even the best fiction for verve, pace, and impact, a verdict the contemporary antislavery leader Edmund Quincy indirectly delivered in comparing its artistry to that of Daniel Defoe.[2]

Narrative of William W. Brown, published in his chosen name, served as his initial badge of authorship. But authorship by a black man or woman was a badge not easily acquired or worn in pre–Civil War America. Like virtually all his major peers (including Douglass, Henry Bibb, Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, and Solomon Northrup) among antebellum fugitive-slave

1. The quote comes from Brown, *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (New York: Thomas Hamilton; Boston: Wallcut, 1863), 180; see chapter 6.

2. Edmund Quincy (1808–77) was descended from one of the most distinguished families in Massachusetts. He broke with his family's traditional establishment politics by participating in the antislavery movement. Allied with William Lloyd Garrison, he supplied strong support to Brown during the months immediately following Brown's move to Boston in 1847. Quincy's comment comes in his supportive letter for the *Narrative*, which is reprinted in this chapter.

memoirists, Brown required a form of white editorial authorization and/or mediation in order to speak in public. For this reason the text of the *Narrative* was preceded by public letters from prominent white backers, who were presumably called on to vouch for Brown's personal credibility and the authenticity of his work. In fact, Brown addressed these matters in his own text, making control of his name (or his "said name," as his former master derisively refers to it) a central issue.

The primary supporters of *Narrative of William W. Brown* were the regional antislavery society, which published it, and its leader, Quincy, to whom Brown sent the manuscript for review and from whom he received copyediting assistance and a public letter of endorsement. Quincy's public remarks corresponded roughly to his private observations at the time in coupling Brown and Douglass, both of whom he held in high regard as men of high character and writers of forceful moral suasion. Brown's narrative, Quincy stated approvingly, offered a wider field of vision on American slavery than Douglass's, the result of Brown's extensive travels as a slave along the rivers and into the interiors of the South. Privately, Quincy disclosed, he found Brown the more personally agreeable, if the less intellectually formidable, of the two men — an assessment that gradually become something of a commonplace among white antislavery activists.[3] It seems likely, however, that Quincy misjudged Brown's seeming equanimity. A more dispassionate reader can discern the lineaments of Brown's habitually unsettled and unsettling brand of authorship in the *Narrative*: his insubordinate temper, quick wit, and sharp tongue. In fact, one can trace these character traits of the adult author to the adolescent subject, who repeatedly talked back to his masters, undertook multiple subterfuges, and attempted escape at any opportunity, fearless of punishment.

No sooner did he produce the first version of his life story than he began inserting accretions and making revisions designed to extend his narrative and textual control. Encouraged by strong sales that exhausted two printings within six months, Brown took steps to bring out an expanded, illustrated

3. Edmund Quincy, letter to Caroline Weston, July 2, 1847, Antislavery Collection, Weston Family Papers, Boston Public Library.

edition in early 1848, again through his association with the local antislavery society. That edition also garnered robust sales. Seeking yet broader results, Brown transported the stereotype plates of the expanded edition across the Atlantic with him in 1849 and arranged to bring out new printings, with some further additions, in England and possibly Ireland for readers in the British Isles.

About three years into his residence in England, he returned to the task of recording his life story but now in a dramatically altered fashion. The resulting text, *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown*, extended the plot far beyond the end point of the original *Narrative of William W. Brown*, which, like many slave narratives, had little to say about the life lived after slavery. After summarily retelling the story of his two decades as a slave in its opening third, *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown* recounts in greater detail his subsequent activities: as a freewheeling entrepreneur in frontier Michigan, operative of the Underground Railroad, agent and speaker for the organized antislavery societies of New York State and New England, and, since 1849, resident-activist in England. The new text also provided a remarkable account of one of the most crucial omissions of his original slave narrative: his acquisition of literacy. An involuntary autodidact who was probably functionally illiterate until his escape, Brown now told the missing story and turned it into one of the most vivid accounts in the fugitive slave literature of the acquisition, or "theft," of literacy. Although

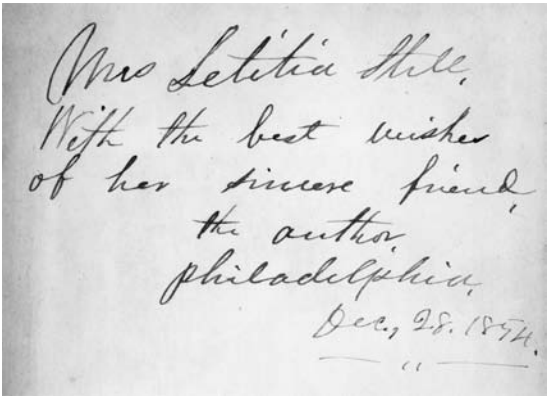
Mrs Letitia Still.
With the best wishes
of her sincere friend,
the author.
Philadelphia,
Dec, 28. 1854.

Figure 1. Inscription on flyleaf of *The American Fugitive in Europe* from the author to Philadelphia friend Letitia Still, wife of antislavery activist William Still. Collection of Ezra Greenspan.

his account of coaxing unwitting boys into teaching him the ABC's and then practicing writing the letters of his name on fence boards stretching a quarter mile may be an exaggeration or even an invention, it richly enacted his understanding of the integral connection between his private name and public speech.

Brown not only updated and amplified his life story; he significantly complicated its mode of narration. The author of *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown* was not only a more broadly experienced and culturally sophisticated individual but also a more resourceful writer. By telling his story for the most part in the third person, he put greater distance between the two poles of his being: the slave-fugitive ("William") and the mature author. He further unsettled narrative and stylistic continuity by filling a fair amount of the updated narrative by quoting from his earlier text — which is to say, by quoting himself. Equally provocative was his decision to publish the new narrative not as a separately bound unit but as the introduction to his new antislavery novel, *Clotel*. In doing so, he implicitly linked the account of his personal ordeal under slavery to that of the characters in the novel, obscuring the lines between fiction and fact and between his characters and himself.

The subheadings for the excerpts from both books are Brown's.

Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself.

—Is there not some chosen curse,
Some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven,
Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man
Who gains his fortune from the blood of souls?

— COWPER[1]

TO WELLS BROWN, OF OHIO.

Thirteen years ago, I came to your door, a weary fugitive from chains and stripes. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was hungry, and you fed me. Naked was I, and you clothed me.[2] Even a name by which to be known among men, slavery had denied me. You bestowed upon me your own. Base indeed should I be, if I ever forget what I owe to you, or do anything to disgrace that honored name!

As a slight testimony of my gratitude to my earliest benefactor, I take the liberty to inscribe to you this little Narrative of the sufferings from which I was fleeing when you had compassion upon me. In the multitude that you have succored, it is very possible that you may not remember me; but until I forget God and myself, I can never forget you.

Your grateful friend,
WILLIAM WELLS BROWN.

The text of *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself* comes from its first printing (Boston: Anti-Slavery Society, 1847).

1. Brown misattributed the authorship of this popular play, *Cato: A Tragedy*, which was actually by the English writer Joseph Addison (1672–1719). Brown also modified the last line: "Who owes his greatness to his country's ruin?" A significant number of the quotations strewn through Brown's *Narrative* are inaccurate, sometimes because of negligence but more often the result of willful alteration.

2. Brown is drawing on various biblical injunctions — most especially Matthew 25:35–36 — to house, nurture, and clothe strangers.

LETTER FROM EDMUND QUINCY, ESQ.

DEDHAM, JULY 1, 1847.
TO WILLIAM W. BROWN.

MY DEAR FRIEND: — I heartily thank you for the privilege of reading the manuscript of your Narrative. I have read it with deep interest and strong emotion. I am much mistaken if it be not greatly successful and eminently useful. It presents a different phase of the infernal slave-system from that portrayed in the admirable story of Mr. Douglass, and gives us a glimpse of its hideous cruelties in other portions of its domain.

Your opportunities of observing the workings of this accursed system have been singularly great. Your experiences in the Field, in the House, and especially on the River in the service of the slave-trader, Walker, have been such as few individuals have had; — no one, certainly, who has been competent to describe them. What I have admired, and marvelled at, in your Narrative, is the simplicity and calmness with which you describe scenes and actions which might well "move the very stones to rise and mutiny" against the National Institution which makes them possible.[3]

You will perceive that I have made very sparing use of your flattering permission to alter what you had written. To correct a few errors, which appeared to be merely clerical ones, committed in the hurry of composition, under unfavorable circumstances, and to suggest a few curtailments, is all that I have ventured to do. I should be a bold man, as well as a vain one, if I should attempt to improve your descriptions of what you have seen and suffered. Some of the scenes are not unworthy of De Foe himself.

I trust and believe that your Narrative will have a wide circulation. I am sure it deserves it. At least, a man must be differently constituted from me, who can rise from the perusal of your Narrative without feeling that he understands slavery better, and hates it worse, than he ever did before.

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3. A slight misquote of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 3.2.229–30: "move / The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny."

I am, very faithfully and respectfully,
Your friend,

EDMUND QUINCY.

PREFACE.

The friends of freedom may well congratulate each other on the appearance of the following Narrative. It adds another volume to the rapidly increasing anti-slavery literature of the age. It has been remarked by a close observer of human nature, "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws"[4]; and it may with equal truth be said, that, among a reading people like our own, their books will at least give character to their laws. It is an influence which goes forth noiselessly upon its mission, but fails not to find its way to many a warm heart, to kindle on the altar thereof the fires of freedom, which will one day break forth in a living flame to consume oppression.

This little book is a voice from the prison-house, unfolding the deeds of darkness which are there perpetrated. Our cause has received efficient aid from this source. The names of those who have come from thence, and battled manfully for the right, need not to be recorded here. The works of some of them are an enduring monument of praise, and their perpetual record shall be found in the grateful hearts of the redeemed bondman.

Few persons have had greater facilities for becoming acquainted with slavery, in all its horrible aspects, than WILLIAM W. BROWN. He has been behind the curtain. He has visited its secret chambers. Its iron has entered his own soul. The dearest ties of nature have been riven in his own person. A mother has been cruelly scourged before his own eyes. A

4. This widely quoted declaration is generally believed to have originated with the Scottish statesman Andrew Fletcher (1653–1716).

father,—alas! slaves have no father. A brother has been made the subject of its tender mercies. A sister has been given up to the irresponsible control of the pale-faced oppressor. This nation looks on approvingly. The American Union sanctions the deed. The Constitution shields the criminals. American religion sanctifies the crime. But the tide is turning. Already, a mighty undercurrent is sweeping onward. The voice of warning, of remonstrance, of rebuke, of entreaty, has gone forth. Hand is linked in hand, and heart mingles with heart, in this great work of the slave's deliverance.

The convulsive throes of the monster, even now, give evidence of deep wounds.

The writer of this Narrative was hired by his master to a "*soul-driver*," and has witnessed all the horrors of the traffic, from the buying up of human cattle in the slave-breeding States, which produced a constant scene of separating the victims from all those whom they loved, to their final sale in the southern market, to be worked up in seven years, or given over to minister to the lust of southern *Christians*.

Many harrowing scenes are graphically portrayed; and yet with that simplicity and ingenuousness which carries with it a conviction of the truthfulness of the picture.

This book will do much to unmask those who have "clothed themselves in the livery of the court of heaven" to cover up the enormity of their deeds.

During the past three years, the author has devoted his entire energies to the anti-slavery cause. Laboring under all the disabilities and disadvantages growing out of his education in slavery—subjected, as he had been from his birth, to all the wrongs and deprivations incident to his condition—he yet went forth, impelled to the work by a love of liberty—stimulated by the remembrance of his own sufferings—urged on by the consideration that a mother, brothers, and sister, were still grinding in the prison-house of bondage, in common with three millions of our Father's children—sustained by an unfaltering faith in the omnipotence of truth and the final triumph of justice—to plead the cause of the slave, and by the eloquence of earnestness carried conviction to

many minds, and enlisted the sympathy and secured the co-operation of many to the cause.

His labors have been chiefly confined to Western New York, where he has secured many warm friends, by his untiring zeal, persevering energy, continued fidelity, and universal kindness.

Reader, are you an Abolitionist? What have you done for the slave? What are you doing in his behalf? What do you purpose to do? There is a great work before us. Who will be an idler now? This is the great humanitary movement of the age, swallowing up, for the time being, all other questions, comparatively speaking. The course of human events, in obedience to the unchangeable laws of our being, is fast hastening the final crisis, and

> "Have ye chosen, O my people, on whose party ye shall stand,
> Ere the Doom from its worn sandal shakes the dust against our land?"[5]

Are you a Christian? This is the carrying out of practical Christianity; and there is no other. Christianity is *practical* in its very nature and essence. It is a life, springing out of a soul imbued with its spirit. Are you a friend of the missionary cause? This is the greatest missionary enterprize of the day. Three millions of *Christian*, law-manufactured heathen are longing for the glad tidings of the Gospel of freedom. Are you a friend of the Bible? Come, then, and help us to restore to these millions, whose eyes have been bored out by slavery, their sight, that they may see to read the Bible. Do you love God whom you have not seen? Then manifest that love, by restoring to your brother whom you have seen, his rightful inheritance, of which he has been so long and so cruelly deprived.

It is not for a single generation alone, numbering three millions — sublime as would be that effort — that we are working. It is for HUMANITY, the wide world over, not only now, but for all coming time, and all future generations: —

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5. From "The Present Crisis" (1845), by James Russell Lowell (1819–91), a well-born Massachusetts man of letters sympathetic to the antislavery cause.

"For he who settles Freedom's principles,
Writes the death-warrant of all tyranny."[6]

It is a vast work — a glorious enterprize — worthy the unswerving devotion of the entire life-time of the great and the good.

Slaveholding and slaveholders must be rendered disreputable and odious. They must be stripped of their respectability and Christian reputation. They must be treated as "MEN-STEALERS — guilty of the highest kind of theft, and sinners of the first rank." Their more guilty accomplices in the persons of *northern apologists*, both in Church and State, must be placed in the same category. Honest men must be made to look upon their crimes with the same abhorrence and loathing, with which they regard the less guilty robber and assassin, until

"The common damned shun their society,
And look upon themselves as fiends less foul."[7]

When a just estimate is placed upon the crime of slaveholding, the work will have been accomplished, and the glorious day ushered in —

"When man nor woman in all our wide domain,
Shall buy, or sell, or hold, or be a slave."

J. C. HATHAWAY.[8]
Farmington, N.Y., 1847.

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6. From "L'Envoi" (1843), also by Lowell.

7. From *The Grave*, the best-known work by the Scottish poet Robert Blair (1699–1746).

8. Joseph C. Hathaway (1810–73) was president of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, the organization for which Brown served as a paid lecturer from 1843 to 1847. Hathaway (or Brown) has Americanized the closing lines of the Scottish poet James Montgomery's "Inscription under the Picture of an Aged Negro-woman" (1826): "Till man nor woman under Britain's laws, / Nor son nor daughter within her empire, / Shall buy, or hold, or sell, or be, a slave."

NARRATIVE.

Chapter 1

I was born in Lexington, Ky. The man who stole me as soon as I was born, recorded the births of all the infants which he claimed to be born his property, in a book which he kept for that purpose. My mother's name was Elizabeth. She had seven children, viz: Solomon, Leander, Benjamin, Joseph, Millford, Elizabeth, and myself. No two of us were children of the same father. My father's name, as I learned from my mother, was George Higgins. He was a white man, a relative of my master, and connected with some of the first families in Kentucky.

My master owned about forty slaves, twenty-five of whom were field hands. He removed from Kentucky to Missouri, when I was quite young, and settled thirty or forty miles above St. Charles, on the Missouri, where, in addition to his practice as a physician, he carried on milling, merchandizing and farming.[9] He had a large farm, the principal productions of which were tobacco and hemp. The slave cabins were situated on the back part of the farm, with the house of the overseer, whose name was Grove Cook, in their midst. He had the entire charge of the farm, and having no family, was allowed a woman to keep house for him, whose business it was to deal out the provisions for the hands.

A woman was also kept at the quarters to do the cooking for the field hands, who were summoned to their unrequited toil every morning at four o'clock, by the ringing of a bell, hung on a post near the house of the overseer. They were allowed half an hour to eat their breakfast, and get to the field. At half past four, a horn was blown by the overseer, which was the signal to commence work; and every one that was not on the spot at the time, had to receive ten lashes from the negro-whip, with which

9. Missouri was still a territory when Brown arrived there as a small child in 1816. It gained statehood in 1821 as a slave state under the provisions of the Missouri Compromise. St. Charles was its original capital until succeeded by Jefferson City in 1826.

the overseer always went armed. The handle was about three feet long, with the butt-end filled with lead, and the lash six or seven feet in length, made of cowhide, with platted wire on the end of it. This whip was put in requisition very frequently and freely, and a small offence on the part of a slave furnished an occasion for its use. During the time that Mr. Cook was overseer, I was a house servant — a situation preferable to that of a field hand, as I was better fed, better clothed, and not obliged to rise at the ringing of the bell, but about half an hour after. I have often laid and heard the crack of the whip, and the screams of the slave. My mother was a field hand, and one morning was ten or fifteen minutes behind the others in getting into the field. As soon as she reached the spot where they were at work, the overseer commenced whipping her. She cried, "Oh! pray — Oh! pray — Oh! pray" — these are generally the words of slaves, when imploring mercy at the hands of their oppressors. I heard her voice, and knew it, and jumped out of my bunk, and went to the door. Though the field was some distance from the house, I could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother. I remained at the door, not daring to venture any farther. The cold chills ran over me, and I wept aloud. After giving her ten lashes, the sound of the whip ceased, and I returned to my bed, and found no consolation but in my tears. It was not yet daylight.

Chapter 2

My master being a political demagogue, soon found those who were ready to put him into office, for the favors he could render them; and a few years after his arrival in Missouri, he was elected to a seat in the Legislature. In his absence from home, everything was left in charge of Mr. Cook, the overseer, and he soon became more tyrannical and cruel. Among the slaves on the plantation, was one by the name of Randall. He was a man about six feet high, and well-proportioned, and known as a man of great strength and power. He was considered the most valuable and able-bodied slave on the plantation; but no matter how good or use-

ful a slave may be, he seldom escapes the lash. But it was not so with Randall. He had been on the plantation since my earliest recollection, and I had never known of his being flogged. No thanks were due to the master or overseer for this. I have often heard him declare, that no white man should ever whip him — that he would die first.

Cook, from the time that he came upon the plantation, had frequently declared, that he could and would flog any nigger that was put into the field to work under him. My master had repeatedly told him not to attempt to whip Randall, but he was determined to try it. As soon as he was left sole dictator, he thought the time had come to put his threats into execution. He soon began to find fault with Randall, and threatened to whip him, if he did not do better. One day he gave him a very hard task, — more than he could possibly do; and at night, the task not being performed, he told Randall that he should remember him the next morning. On the following morning, after the hands had taken breakfast, Cook called out to Randall, and told him that he intended to whip him, and ordered him to cross his hands and be tied. Randall asked why he wished to whip him. He answered, because he had not finished his task the day before. Randall said that the task was too great, or he should have done it. Cook said it made no difference, — he should whip him. Randall stood silent for a moment, and then said, "Mr. Cook, I have always tried to please you since you have been on the plantation, and I find you are determined not to be satisfied with my work, let me do as well as I may. No man has laid hands on me, to whip me, for the last ten years, and I have long since come to the conclusion not to be whipped by any man living." Cook, finding by Randall's determined look and gestures, that he would resist, called three of the hands from their work, and commanded them to seize Randall, and tie him. The hands stood still; — they knew Randall — and they also knew him to be a powerful man, and were afraid to grapple with him. As soon as Cook had ordered the men to seize him, Randall turned to them, and said — "Boys, you all know me; you know that I can handle any three of you, and the man that lays hands on me shall die. This white man can't whip me himself, and therefore he has called you to help him." The overseer was unable to prevail upon them

to seize and secure Randall, and finally ordered them all to go to their work together.

Nothing was said to Randall by the overseer, for more than a week. One morning, however, while the hands were at work in the field, he came into it, accompanied by three friends of his, Thompson, Woodbridge and Jones. They came up to where Randall was at work, and Cook ordered him to leave his work, and go with them to the barn. He refused to go; whereupon he was attacked by the overseer and his companions, when he turned upon them, and laid them, one after another, prostrate on the ground. Woodbridge drew out his pistol, and fired at him, and brought him to the ground by a pistol ball. The others rushed upon him with their clubs, and beat him over the head and face, until they succeeded in tying him. He was then taken to the barn, and tied to a beam. Cook gave him over one hundred lashes with a heavy cowhide, had him washed with salt and water, and left him tied during the day. The next day he was untied, and taken to a blacksmith's shop, and had a ball and chain attached to his leg. He was compelled to labor in the field, and perform the same amount of work that the other hands did. When his master returned home, he was much pleased to find that Randall had been subdued in his absence.

Chapter 3

Soon afterwards, my master removed to the city of St. Louis, and purchased a farm four miles from there, which he placed under the charge of an overseer by the name of Friend Haskell. He was a regular Yankee from New England. The Yankees are noted for making the most cruel overseers.

My mother was hired out in the city, and I was also hired out there to Major Freeland, who kept a public house. He was formerly from Virginia, and was a horse-racer, cock-fighter, gambler, and withal an inveterate drunkard. There were ten or twelve servants in the house, and when he was present, it was cut and slash — knock down and drag out. In his fits of anger, he would take up a chair, and throw it at a servant; and in

his more rational moments, when he wished to chastise one, he would tie them up in the smoke-house, and whip them; after which, he would cause a fire to be made of tobacco stems, and smoke them. This he called "*Virginia play*."[10]

I complained to my master of the treatment which I received from Major Freeland; but it made no difference. He cared nothing about it, so long as he received the money for my labor. After living with Major Freeland five or six months, I ran away, and went into the woods back of the city; and when night came on, I made my way to my master's farm, but was afraid to be seen, knowing that if Mr. Haskell, the overseer, should discover me, I should be again carried back to Major Freeland; so I kept in the woods. One day, while in the woods, I heard the barking and howling of dogs, and in a short time they came so near, that I knew them to be the bloodhounds of Major Benjamin O'Fallon. He kept five or six, to hunt runaway slaves with.

As soon as I was convinced that it was them, I knew there was no chance of escape. I took refuge in the top of a tree, and the hounds were soon at its base, and there remained until the hunters came up in a half or three quarters of an hour afterwards. There were two men with the dogs, who, as soon as they came up, ordered me to descend. I came down, was tied, and taken to St. Louis jail. Major Freeland soon made his appearance, and took me out, and ordered me to follow him, which I did. After we returned home, I was tied up in the smoke-house, and was very severely whipped. After the Major had flogged me to his satisfaction, he sent out his son Robert, a young man eighteen or twenty years of age, to see that I was well smoked. He made a fire of tobacco stems, which soon set me to coughing and sneezing. This, Robert told me, was the way his father used to do to his slaves in Virginia. After giving me what they conceived to be a decent smoking, I was untied and again set to work.

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10. Brown was familiar with this form of punishment from his own experience. His righteous indignation against all forms of torture led him to the act, documented in *The American Fugitive in Europe*, of packing a "Negro collar" in one of his trunks for exhibition in England of the horrors of American slavery (see chapter 3).

Robert Freeland was a "chip off the old block." Though quite young, it was not unfrequently that he came home in a state of intoxication. He is now, I believe, a popular commander of a steamboat on the Mississippi river. Major Freeland soon after failed in business, and I was put on board the steamboat Missouri, which plied between St. Louis and Galena.[11] The commander of the boat was William B. Culver. I remained on her during the sailing season, which was the most pleasant time for me that I had ever experienced. At the close of navigation, I was hired to Mr. John Colburn, keeper of the Missouri Hotel. He was from one of the Free States; but a more inveterate hater of the negro, I do not believe ever walked on God's green earth. This hotel was at that time one of the largest in the city, and there were employed in it twenty or thirty servants, mostly slaves.

Mr. Colburn was very abusive, not only to the servants, but to his wife also, who was an excellent woman, and one from whom I never knew a servant to receive a harsh word; but never did I know a kind one to a servant from her husband. Among the slaves employed in the hotel, was one by the name of Aaron, who belonged to Mr. John F. Darby, a lawyer. Aaron was the knife-cleaner. One day, one of the knives was put on the table, not as clean as it might have been. Mr. Colburn, for this offence, tied Aaron up in the wood-house, and gave him over fifty lashes on the bare back with a cowhide, after which, he made me wash him down with rum. This seemed to put him into more agony than the whipping. After being untied, he went home to his master, and complained of the treatment which he had received. Mr. Darby would give no heed to anything he had to say, but sent him directly back. Colburn, learning that he had been to his master with complaints, tied him up again, and gave him a more severe whipping than before. The poor fellow's back was literally cut to pieces; so much so, that he was not able to work for ten or twelve days.

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11. Galena, Illinois, is a port city on the Galena River, a tributary of the Mississippi. In 1824 the first steamboat reached the city, which became an important shipping center for the transport of lead ore.

There was also, among the servants, a girl whose master resided in the country. Her name was Patsey. Mr. Colburn tied her up one evening, and whipped her until several of the boarders came out and begged him to desist. The reason for whipping her was this. She was engaged to be married to a man belonging to Major William Christy, who resided four or five miles north of the city. Mr. Colburn had forbid her to see John Christy. The reason of this was said to be the regard which he himself had for Patsey. She went to meeting that evening, and John returned home with her. Mr. Colburn had intended to flog John, if he came within the inclosure; but John knew too well the temper of his rival, and kept at a safe distance; — so he took vengeance on the poor girl. If all the slave-drivers had been called together, I do not think a more cruel man than John Colburn, — and he too a northern man, — could have been found among them.

While living at the Missouri Hotel, a circumstance occurred which caused me great unhappiness. My master sold my mother, and all her children, except myself. They were sold to different persons in the city of St. Louis.

Chapter 4

I was soon after taken from Mr. Colburn's, and hired to Elijah P. Lovejoy, who was at that time publisher and editor of the "St. Louis Times."[12] My work, while with him, was mainly in the printing office,

12. Brown was an illiterate teenager when he worked for Lovejoy (1802–37), who had not yet embarked on his antislavery editorial career. About three years after employing Brown in his print shop for the *St. Louis Times*, Lovejoy took over operation of the *St. Louis Observer*, which he made controversial by adopting an antislavery editorial stance in a generally proslavery city. Run out of town in 1836 for refusing to moderate his views, Lovejoy set up his press across the Mississippi River in Alton, Illinois, and resumed his antislavery agitation. He was shot to death on the night of November 7, 1838, while defending his print shop against mob violence. Reports about his murder circulated nationally, turning Lovejoy into one of the earliest white martyrs of the antislavery movement.

waiting on the hands, working the press, &c. Mr. Lovejoy was a very good man, and decidedly the best master that I had ever had. I am chiefly indebted to him, and to my employment in the printing office, for what little learning I obtained while in slavery.[13]

Though slavery is thought, by some, to be mild in Missouri, when compared with the cotton, sugar and rice growing States, yet no part of our slave-holding country, is more noted for the barbarity of its inhabitants, than St. Louis. It was here that Col. Harney, a United States officer, whipped a slave woman to death.[14] It was here that Francis McIntosh, a free colored man from Pittsburgh, was taken from the steamboat Flora, and burned at the stake. During a residence of eight years in this city, numerous cases of extreme cruelty came under my own observation;—to record them all, would occupy more space than could possibly be allowed in this little volume. I shall, therefore, give but a few more, in addition to what I have already related.

Capt. J. B. Brunt, who resided near my master, had a slave named John. He was his body servant, carriage driver, &c. On one occasion, while driving his master through the city,—the streets being very muddy, and the horses going at a rapid rate,—some mud spattered upon a gentleman by the name of Robert More. More was determined to be revenged. Some three or four months after this occurrence, he purchased John, for the express purpose, as he said, "to tame the d—d nigger." After the purchase, he took him to a blacksmith's shop, and had a ball and chain fastened to his leg, and then put him to driving a yoke of oxen, and kept him at hard labor, until the iron around his leg was so worn into the flesh, that it was thought mortification would ensue. In addition to this, John told me that his master whipped him regularly three times a week for the first two months:—and all this to "*tame him.*" A more

13. Since Brown was not used as a compositor, it seems unlikely that he attained literacy during his period of service with Lovejoy.

14. Colonel William Harney (1800–89) was indicted by a St. Louis court for this crime but not convicted. He was also formally charged with other acts of brutality, including the rapes and hangings of Native American women during the Indian Wars. Shortly afterward he was promoted.

noble looking man than he, was not to be found in all St. Louis, before he fell into the hands of More; and a more degraded and spirit-crushed looking being was never seen on a southern plantation, after he had been subjected to this "*taming*" process for three months. The last time that I saw him, he had nearly lost the entire use of his limbs.

While living with Mr. Lovejoy, I was often sent on errands to the office of the "Missouri Republican," published by Mr. Edward Charles. Once, while returning to the office with type, I was attacked by several large boys, sons of slave-holders, who pelted me with snow-balls. Having the heavy form of type in my hands, I could not make my escape by running; so I laid down the type and gave them battle. They gathered around me, pelting me with stones and sticks, until they overpowered me, and would have captured me, if I had not resorted to my heels. Upon my retreat, they took possession of the type; and what to do to regain it I could not devise. Knowing Mr. Lovejoy to be a very humane man, I went to the office, and laid the case before him. He told me to remain in the office. He took one of the apprentices with him, and went after the type, and soon returned with it; but on his return informed me that Samuel McKinney had told him that he would whip me, because I had hurt his boy. Soon after, McKinney was seen making his way to the office by one of the printers, who informed me of the fact, and I made my escape through the back door.

McKinney not being able to find me on his arrival, left the office in a great rage, swearing that he would whip me to death. A few days after, as I was walking along Main Street, he seized me by the collar, and struck me over the head five or six times with a large cane, which caused the blood to gush from my nose and ears in such a manner that my clothes were completely saturated with blood. After beating me to his satisfaction, he let me go, and I returned to the office so weak from the loss of blood, that Mr. Lovejoy sent me home to my master. It was five weeks before I was able to walk again. During this time, it was necessary to have some one to supply my place at the office, and I lost the situation.

After my recovery, I was hired to Capt. Otis Reynolds, as a waiter on board the steamboat Enterprize, owned by Messrs. John and Edward

Walsh, commission merchants at St. Louis. This boat was then running on the upper Mississippi. My employment on board was to wait on gentlemen, and the captain being a good man, the situation was a pleasant one to me;—but in passing from place to place, and seeing new faces every day, and knowing that they could go where they pleased, I soon became unhappy, and several times thought of leaving the boat at some landing place, and trying to make my escape to Canada, which I had heard much about as a place where the slave might live, be free, and be protected.

But whenever such thoughts would come into my mind, my resolution would soon be shaken by the remembrance that my dear mother was a slave in St. Louis, and I could not bear the idea of leaving her in that condition. She had often taken me upon her knee, and told me how she had carried me upon her back to the field when I was an infant—how often she had been whipped for leaving her work to nurse me—and how happy I would appear when she would take me into her arms. When these thoughts came over me, I would resolve never to leave the land of slavery without my mother. I thought that to leave her in slavery, after she had undergone and suffered so much for me, would be proving recreant to the duty which I owed to her. Besides this, I had three brothers and a sister there,—two of my brothers having died.

My mother, my brothers Joseph and Millford, and my sister Elizabeth, belonged to Mr. Isaac Mansfield, formerly from one of the Free States, (Massachusetts, I believe.) He was a tinner by trade, and carried on a large manufacturing establishment. Of all my relatives, mother was first, and sister next. One evening, while visiting them, I made some allusion to a proposed journey to Canada, and sister took her seat by my side, and taking my hand in hers, said, with tears in her eyes,—

"Brother, you are not going to leave mother and your dear sister here without a friend, are you?"

I looked into her face, as the tears coursed swiftly down her cheeks, and bursting into tears myself, said—

"No, I will never desert you and mother."

She clasped my hand in hers, and said—

"Brother, you have often declared that you would not end your days in

slavery. I see no possible way in which you can escape with us; and now, brother, you are on a steamboat where there is some chance for you to escape to a land of liberty. I beseech you not to let us hinder you. If we cannot get our liberty, we do not wish to be the means of keeping you from a land of freedom."

I could restrain my feelings no longer, and an outburst of my own feelings, caused her to cease speaking upon that subject. In opposition to their wishes, I pledged myself not to leave them in the hand of the oppressor. I took leave of them, and returned to the boat, and laid down in my bunk; but "sleep departed from my eyes, and slumber from my eyelids."[15]

A few weeks after, on our downward passage, the boat took on board, at Hannibal, a drove of slaves, bound for the New Orleans market.[16] They numbered from fifty to sixty, consisting of men and women from eighteen to forty years of age. A drove of slaves on a southern steamboat, bound for the cotton or sugar regions, is an occurrence so common, that no one, not even the passengers, appear to notice it, though they clank their chains at every step. There was, however, one in this gang that attracted the attention of the passengers and crew. It was a beautiful girl, apparently about twenty years of age, perfectly white, with straight light hair and blue eyes. But it was not the whiteness of her skin that created such a sensation among those who gazed upon her — it was her almost unparalleled beauty. She had been on the boat but a short time, before the attention of all the passengers, including the ladies, had been called to her, and the common topic of conversation was about the beautiful slave-girl. She was not in chains. The man who claimed this article of human merchandize was a Mr. Walker, — a well known slave-trader, residing in St. Louis. There was a general anxiety among the passengers and crew

15. Probably an adaptation from Psalms 132:4: "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids."

16. Hannibal, Missouri, was a port of landing for steamboats plying the Mississippi River. Later in the century it would gain fame as the site of the boyhood home of Mark Twain and the setting for his most famous novels.

to learn the history of the girl. Her master kept close by her side, and it would have been considered impudent for any of the passengers to have spoken to her, and the crew were not allowed to have any conversation with them. When we reached St. Louis, the slaves were removed to a boat bound for New Orleans, and the history of the beautiful slave-girl remained a mystery.[17]

I remained on the boat during the season, and it was not an unfrequent occurrence to have on board gangs of slaves on their way to the cotton, sugar and rice plantations of the South.

Toward the latter part of the summer, Captain Reynolds left the boat, and I was sent home. I was then placed on the farm under Mr. Haskell, the overseer. As I had been some time out of the field, and not accustomed to work in the burning sun, it was very hard; but I was compelled to keep up with the best of the hands.

I found a great difference between the work in a steamboat cabin and that in a corn-field.

My master, who was then living in the city, soon after removed to the farm, when I was taken out of the field to work in the house as a waiter. Though his wife was very peevish, and hard to please, I much preferred to be under her control than the overseer's. They brought with them Mr. Sloane, a Presbyterian minister; Miss Martha Tulley, a neice [*sic*] of theirs from Kentucky; and their nephew William. The latter had been in the family a number of years, but the others were all new-comers.

Mr. Sloane was a young minister, who had been at the South but a short time, and it seemed as if his whole aim was to please the slaveholders, especially my master and mistress. He was intending to make a visit during the winter, and he not only tried to please them, but I think he succeeded admirably. When they wanted singing, he sung; when

17. Stories about white people forced into slavery circulated widely across the antebellum United States. Perhaps the most famous account was that of a German immigrant, Salome Müller (Sally Miller), enslaved after her father's death in 1818 and held in bondage for twenty-five years. She finally gained her freedom (but not that of her children) through a ruling of the Louisiana Supreme Court. Brown was well aware of her case when he wrote *Narrative of William W. Brown* and devoted the entirety of chapter 14 of *Clotel* to its discussion.

they wanted praying, he prayed; when they wanted a story told, he told a story. Instead of his teaching my master theology, my master taught theology to him. While I was with Captain Reynolds, my master "got religion," and new laws were made on the plantation. Formerly, we had the privilege of hunting, fishing, making splint brooms, baskets, &c. on Sunday; but this was all stopped. Every Sunday, we were all compelled to attend meeting. Master was so religious, that he induced some others to join him in hiring a preacher to preach to the slaves.

Chapter 5

My master had family worship, night and morning. At night, the slaves were called in to attend; but in the mornings, they had to be at their work, and master did all the praying. My master and mistress were great lovers of mint julep, and every morning, a pitcher-full was made, of which they all partook freely, not excepting little master William. After drinking freely all round, they would have family worship, and then breakfast. I cannot say but I loved the julep as well as any of them, and during prayer was always careful to seat myself close to the table where it stood, so as to help myself when they were all busily engaged in their devotions. By the time prayer was over, I was about as happy as any of them.[18] A sad accident happened one morning. In helping myself, and at the same time keeping an eye on my old mistress, I accidentally let the pitcher fall upon the floor, breaking it in pieces, and spilling the contents. This was a bad affair for me; for as soon as prayer was over, I was taken and severely chastised.

My master's family consisted of himself, his wife, and their nephew, William Moore. He was taken into the family, when only a few weeks of age. His name being that of my own, mine was changed, for the purpose

18. Mint juleps, a popular alcoholic drink in the South, were typically made of bourbon, sugar, and mint and served cold. Brown's later turn to temperance might have been in part a disgusted reaction to his behavior during these early days.

of giving precedence to his, though I was his senior by ten or twelve years. The plantation being four miles from the city, I had to drive the family to church. I always dreaded the approach of the Sabbath; for, during service, I was obliged to stand by the horses in the hot broiling sun, or in the rain just as it happened.

One Sabbath, as we were driving past the house of D. D. Page, a gentleman who owned a large baking establishment, as I was sitting upon the box of the carriage, which was very much elevated, I saw Mr. Page pursuing a slave around the yard, with a long whip, cutting him at every jump. The man soon escaped from the yard, and was followed by Mr. Page. They came running past us, and the slave perceiving that he would be overtaken, stopped suddenly, and Page stumbled over him, and falling on the stone pavement, fractured one of his legs, which crippled him for life. The same gentleman, but a short time previous, tied up a woman of his, by the name of Delphia, and whipped her nearly to death; yet he was a deacon in the Baptist church, in good and regular standing. Poor Delphia! I was well acquainted with her, and called to see her while upon her sick bed; and I shall never forget her appearance. She was a member of the same church with her master.

Soon after this, I was hired out to Mr. Walker; the same man whom I have mentioned as having carried a gang of slaves down the river, on the steamboat Enterprize. Seeing me in the capacity of steward on the boat, and thinking that I would make a good hand to take care of slaves, he determined to have me for that purpose; and finding that my master would not sell me, he hired me for the term of one year.

When I learned the fact of my having been hired to a negro speculator, or a "soul-driver" as they are generally called among slaves, no one can tell my emotions. Mr. Walker had offered a high price for me, as I afterwards learned, but I suppose my master was restrained from selling me by the fact that I was a near relative of his. On entering the service of Mr. Walker, I found that my opportunity of getting to a land of liberty was gone, at least for the time being. He had a gang of slaves in readiness to start for New Orleans, and in a few days we were on our journey. I am at a loss for language to express my feelings on that occasion. Although

my master had told me that he had not sold me, and Mr. Walker had told me that he had not purchased me, I did not believe them; and not until I had been to New Orleans, and was on my return, did I believe that I was not sold.

There was on the boat a large room on the lower deck, in which the slaves were kept, men and women, promiscuously — all chained two and two, and a strict watch kept that they did not get loose; for cases have occurred in which slaves have got off their chains, and made their escape at landing-places, while the boats were taking in wood; — and with all our care, we lost one woman who had been taken from her husband and children, and having no desire to live without them, in the agony of her soul jumped overboard, and drowned herself. She was not chained.

It was almost impossible to keep that part of the boat clean.

On landing at Natchez, the slaves were all carried to the slave-pen, and there kept one week, during which time, several of them were sold.[19] Mr. Walker fed his slaves well. We took on board, at St. Louis, several hundred pounds of bacon (smoked meat) and corn-meal, and his slaves were better fed than slaves generally were in Natchez, so far as my observation extended.

At the end of a week, we left for New Orleans, the place of our final destination, which we reached in two days. Here the slaves were placed in a negro-pen, where those who wished to purchase could call and examine them. The negro-pen is a small yard, surrounded by buildings, from fifteen to twenty feet wide, with the exception of a large gate with iron bars. The slaves are kept in the buildings during the night, and turned out into the yard during the day After the best of the stock was sold at private sale at the pen, the balance were taken to the Exchange Coffee House Auction Rooms, kept by Isaac L. McCoy, and sold at public auction. After the sale of this lot of slaves, we left New Orleans for St. Louis.

19. Natchez, Mississippi, was a major port on the Mississippi River that served the growing economy of the lower South as a bustling slave market and cotton emporium.

Chapter 6

On our arrival at St. Louis, I went to Dr. Young, and told him that I did not wish to live with Mr. Walker any longer. I was heart-sick at seeing my fellow-creatures bought and sold. But the Dr. had hired me for the year, and stay I must. Mr. Walker again commenced purchasing another gang of slaves. He bought a man of Colonel John O'Fallon, who resided in the suburbs of the city. This man had a wife and three children. As soon as the purchase was made, he was put in jail for safe keeping, until we should be ready to start for New Orleans. His wife visited him while there, several times, and several times when she went for that purpose was refused admittance.

In the course of eight or nine weeks Mr. Walker had his cargo of human flesh made up. There was in this lot a number of old men and women, some of them with gray locks. We left St. Louis in the steamboat Carlton, Captain Swan, bound for New Orleans.[20] On our way down, and before we reached Rodney, the place where we made our first stop, I had to prepare the old slaves for market.[21] I was ordered to have the old men's whiskers shaved off, and the grey hairs plucked out, where they were not too numerous, in which case he had a preparation of blacking to color it, and with a blacking-brush we would put it on. This was new business to me, and was performed in a room where the passengers could not see us. These slaves were also taught how old they were by Mr. Walker, and after going through the blacking process, they looked ten or fifteen years younger; and I am sure that some of those who purchased slaves of Mr. Walker, were dreadfully cheated, especially in the ages of the slaves which they bought.

We landed at Rodney, and the slaves were driven to the pen in the

20. A frequent traveler, Brown follows the nineteenth-century convention of pairing the names of steamboats and their captains.

21. Rodney, Mississippi, was a port on the Mississippi River that, at least during the decade of the 1830s, competed with Natchez and Vicksburg for river traffic.

back part of the village. Several were sold at this place, during our stay of four or five days, when we proceeded to Natchez. There we landed at night, and the gang were put in the warehouse until morning, when they were driven to the pen. As soon as the slaves are put in these pens, swarms of planters may be seen in and about them. They knew when Walker was expected, as he always had the time advertised beforehand when he would be in Rodney, Natchez, and New Orleans. These were the principal places where he offered his slaves for sale.

When at Natchez the second time, I saw a slave very cruelly whipped. He belonged to a Mr. Broadwell, a merchant who kept a store on the wharf. The slave's name was Lewis. I had known him several years, as he was formerly from St. Louis. We were expecting a steamboat down the river, in which we were to take passage for New Orleans. Mr. Walker sent me to the landing to watch for the boat, ordering me to inform him on its arrival. While there, I went into the store to see Lewis. I saw a slave in the store, and asked him where Lewis was. Said he, "They have got Lewis hanging between the heavens and the earth." I asked him what he meant by that. He told me to go into the warehouse and see. I went in, and found Lewis there. He was tied up to a beam, with his toes just touching the floor. As there was no one in the warehouse but himself, I inquired the reason of his being in that situation. He said Mr. Broadwell had sold his wife to a planter six miles from the city, and that he had been to visit her,—that he went in the night, expecting to return before daylight, and went without his master's permission. The patrol had taken him up before he reached his wife. He was put in jail, and his master had to pay for his catching and keeping, and that was what he was tied up for.

Just as he finished his story, Mr. Broadwell came in, and inquired what I was doing there. I knew not what to say, and while I was thinking what reply to make, he struck me over the head with the cowhide, the end of which struck me over my right eye, sinking deep into the flesh, leaving a scar which I carry to this day.[22] Before I visited Lewis, he had received

22. The mark is visible in the frontispiece engraving of Brown in the 1848 edition of the *Narrative of William W. Brown.*

fifty lashes. Mr. Broadwell gave him fifty lashes more after I came out, as I was afterwards informed by Lewis himself.

The next day we proceeded to New Orleans, and put the gang in the same negro-pen which we occupied before. In a short time, the planters came flocking to the pen to purchase slaves. Before the slaves were exhibited for sale, they were dressed and driven out into the yard. Some were set to dancing, some to jumping, some to singing, and some to playing cards. This was done to make them appear cheerful and happy. My business was to see that they were placed in those situations before the arrival of the purchasers, and I have often set them to dancing when their cheeks were wet with tears. As slaves were in good demand at that time, they were all soon disposed of, and we again set out for St. Louis.

On our arrival, Mr. Walker purchased a farm five or six miles from the city. He had no family, but made a housekeeper of one of his female slaves. Poor Cynthia! I knew her well.[23] She was a quadroon, and one of the most beautiful women I ever saw. She was a native of St. Louis, and bore an irreproachable character for virtue and propriety of conduct. Mr. Walker bought her for the New Orleans market, and took her down with him on one of the trips that I made with him. Never shall I forget the circumstances of that voyage! On the first night that we were on board the steamboat, he directed me to put her into a state-room he had provided for her, apart from the other slaves. I had seen too much of the workings of slavery, not to know what this meant. I accordingly watched him into the state-room, and listened to hear what passed between them. I heard him make his base offers, and her reject them. He told her that if she would accept his vile proposals, he would take her back with him to St. Louis, and establish her as his housekeeper at his farm. But if she persisted in rejecting them, he would sell her as a field hand on the worst plantation on the river. Neither threats nor bribes prevailed, however, and he retired, disappointed of his prey.

The next morning, poor Cynthia told me what had past, and bewailed

23. Brown is paraphrasing Hamlet's famous graveyard remark: "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him" (5.1.184).

her sad fate with floods of tears. I comforted and encouraged her all I could; but I foresaw but too well what the result must be. Without entering into any farther particulars, suffice it to say that Walker performed his part of the contract, at that time. He took her back to St. Louis, established her as his mistress and housekeeper at his farm, and before I left, he had two children by her. But, mark the end! Since I have been at the North, I have been credibly informed that Walker has been married, and, as a previous measure, sold poor Cynthia and her four children (she having had two more since I came away) into hopeless bondage!

He soon commenced purchasing to make up the third gang. We took steamboat, and went to Jefferson City, a town on the Missouri river. Here we landed, and took stage for the interior of the State. He bought a number of slaves as he passed the different farms and villages. After getting twenty-two or twenty-three men and women, we arrived at St. Charles, a village on the banks of the Missouri. Here he purchased a woman who had a child in her arms, appearing to be four or five weeks old.

We had been travelling by land for some days, and were in hopes to have found a boat at this place for St. Louis, but were disappointed. As no boat was expected for some days, we started for St. Louis by land. Mr. Walker had purchased two horses. He rode one, and I the other. The slaves were chained together, and we took up our line of march, Mr. Walker taking the lead, and I bringing up the rear. Though the distance was not more than twenty miles, we did not reach it the first day. The road was worse than any that I have ever travelled.

Soon after we left St. Charles, the young child grew very cross, and kept up a noise during the greater part of the day. Mr. Walker complained of its crying several times, and told the mother to stop the child's d—d noise, or he would. The woman tried to keep the child from crying, but could not. We put up at night with an acquaintance of Mr. Walker, and in the morning, just as we were about to start, the child again commenced crying. Walker stepped up to her, and told her to give the child to him. The mother tremblingly obeyed. He took the child by one arm, as you would a cat by the leg, walked into the house, and said to the lady,

"Madam, I will make you a present of this little nigger; it keeps such a noise that I can't bear it."

"Thank you, sir," said the lady.

The mother, as soon as she saw that her child was to be left, ran up to Mr. Walker, and falling upon her knees begged him to let her have her child; she clung around his legs, and cried, "Oh, my child! my child! master, do let me have my child! oh, do, do, do. I will stop its crying, if you will only let me have it again." When I saw this woman crying for her child so piteously, a shudder, — a feeling akin to horror, shot through my frame. I have often since in imagination heard her crying for her child: —

"O, master, let me stay to catch
    My baby's sobbing breath,
His little glassy eye to watch,
    And smooth his limbs in death,

And cover him with grass and leaf,
    Beneath the large oak tree:
It is not sullenness, but grief, —
    O, master, pity me!

The morn was chill — I spoke no word,
    But feared my babe might die,
And heard all day, or thought I heard,
    My little baby cry.

At noon, oh, how I ran and took
    My baby to my breast!
I lingered — and the long lash broke
    My sleeping infant's rest.

I worked till night — till darkest night,
    In torture and disgrace;
Went home and watched till morning light,
    To see my baby's face.

Then give me but one little hour —
O! do not lash me so!
One little hour — one little hour —
And gratefully I'll go."[24]

Mr. Walker commanded her to return into the ranks with the other slaves. Women who had children were not chained, but those that had none were. As soon as her child was disposed of, she was chained in the gang.

The following song I have often heard the slaves sing, when about to be carried to the far south. It is said to have been composed by a slave.

"See these poor souls from Africa
Transported to America;
We are stolen, and sold to Georgia,
Will you go along with me?
We are stolen, and sold to Georgia,
Come sound the jubilee!

See wives and husbands sold apart,
Their children's screams will break my heart; —
There's a better day a coming,
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!

O, gracious Lord! when shall it be,
That we poor souls shall all be free;
Lord, break them slavery powers —
Will you go along with me?
Lord break them slavery powers,
Go sound the jubilee!

24. From "The Slave and Her Babe," by Charlotte Elizabeth (1790–1846).

Dear Lord, dear Lord, when slavery'll cease,
Then we poor souls will have our peace;—
There's a better day a coming,
Will you go along with me?
There's a better day a coming,
Go sound the jubilee!"[25]

We finally arrived at Mr. Walker's farm. He had a house built during our absence to put slaves in. It was a kind of domestic jail. The slaves were put in the jail at night, and worked on the farm during the day. They were kept here until the gang was completed, when we again started for New Orleans, on board the steamboat North America, Capt. Alexander Scott. We had a large number of slaves in this gang. One, by the name of Joe, Mr. Walker was training up to take my place, as my time was nearly out, and glad was I. We made our first stop at Vicksburg, where we remained one week and sold several slaves.[26]

Mr. Walker, though not a good master, had not flogged a slave since I had been with him, though he had threatened me. The slaves were kept in the pen, and he always put up at the best hotel, and kept his wines in his room, for the accommodation of those who called to negotiate with him for the purchase of slaves. One day while we were at Vicksburg, several gentlemen came to see him for this purpose, and as usual the wine was called for. I took the tray and started around with it, and having accidentally filled some of the glasses too full, the gentlemen spilled the wine on their clothes as they went to drink. Mr. Walker apologized to them for my carelessness, but looked at me as though he would see me again on this subject.

After the gentlemen had left the room, he asked me what I meant by my carelessness, and said that he would attend to me. The next morning,

25. Brown would reprint this well-known spiritual, "Song of the Coffle Gang," the following year in his collection of antislavery songs, *The Anti-Slavery Harp* (1848).

26. Vicksburg, Mississippi, was another of the port cities along the Mississippi River that prospered from the river traffic during the nineteenth century.

he gave me a note to carry to the jailer, and a dollar in money to give to him. I suspected that all was not right, so I went down near the landing where I met with a sailor, and walking up to him, asked him if he would be so kind as to read the note for me. He read it over, and then looked at me. I asked him to tell me what was in it. Said he,

"They are going to give you hell."

"Why?" said I.

He said, "This is a note to have you whipped, and says that you have a dollar to pay for it."

He handed me back the note, and off I started. I knew not what to do, but was determined not to be whipped. I went up to the jail—took a look at it, and walked off again. As Mr. Walker was acquainted with the jailer, I feared that I should be found out if I did not go, and be treated in consequence of it still worse.

While I was meditating on the subject, I saw a colored man about my size walk up, and the thought struck me in a moment to send him with my note. I walked up to him, and asked him who he belonged to. He said he was a free man, and had been in the city but a short time. I told him I had a note to go into the jail, and get a trunk to carry to one of the steamboats; but was so busily engaged that I could not do it, although I had a dollar to pay for it. He asked me if I would not give him the job. I handed him the note and the dollar, and off he started for the jail.

I watched to see that he went in, and as soon as I saw the door close behind him, I walked around the corner, and took my station, intending to see how my friend looked when he came out. I had been there but a short time, when a colored man came around the corner, and said to another colored man with whom he was acquainted—

"They are giving a nigger scissors in the jail."

"What for?" said the other. The man continued,

"A nigger came into the jail, and asked for the jailer. The jailer came out, and he handed him a note, and said he wanted to get a trunk. The jailer told him to go with him, and he would give him the trunk. So he took him into the room, and told the nigger to give up the dollar. He said a man had given him the dollar to pay for getting the trunk. But that lie

would not answer. So they made him strip himself, and then they tied him down, and are now whipping him."

I stood by all the while listening to their talk, and soon found out that the person alluded to was my customer. I went into the street opposite the jail, and concealed myself in such a manner that I could not be seen by any one coming out. I had been there but a short time, when the young man made his appearance, and looked around for me. I, unobserved, came forth from my hiding-place, behind a pile of brick, and he pretty soon saw me and came up to me complaining bitterly, saying that I had played a trick upon him. I denied any knowledge of what the note contained, and asked him what they had done to him. He told me in substance what I heard the man tell who had come out of the jail.

"Yes," said he, "they whipped me and took my dollar, and gave me this note."

He showed me the note which the jailer had given him, telling him to give it to his master. I told him I would give him fifty cents for it,—that being all the money I had. He gave it to me, and took his money. He had received twenty lashes on his bare back, with the negro-whip.

I took the note and started for the hotel where I had left Mr. Walker. Upon reaching the hotel, I handed it to a stranger whom I had not seen before, and requested him to read it to me. As near as I can recollect, it was as follows:—

"DEAR SIR:—By your direction, I have given your boy twenty lashes. He is a very saucy boy, and tried to make me believe that he did not belong to you, and I put it on to him well for lying to me.

I remain,
Your obedient servant."

It is true that in most of the slave-holding cities, when a gentleman wishes his servants whipped, he can send him to the jail and have it done. Before I went in where Mr. Walker was, I wet my cheeks a little, as though I had been crying. He looked at me, and inquired what was the matter. I told him that I had never had such a whipping in my life, and

handed him the note. He looked at it and laughed;—"and so you told him that you did not belong to me." "Yes, sir," said I. "I did not know that there was any harm in that." He told me I must behave myself, if I did not want to be whipped again.

This incident shows how it is that slavery makes its victims lying and mean; for which vices it afterwards reproaches them, and uses them as arguments to prove that they deserve no better fate. I have often, since my escape, deeply regretted the deception I practised upon this poor fellow; and I heartily desire that it may be, at some time or other, in my power to make him amends for his vicarious sufferings in my behalf.

Chapter 7

In a few days we reached New Orleans, and arriving there in the night, remained on board until morning. While at New Orleans this time, I saw a slave killed; an account of which has been published by Theodore D. Weld, in his book entitled, "Slavery as it is."[27] The circumstances were as follows. In the evening, between seven and eight o'clock, a slave came running down the levee, followed by several men and boys. The whites were crying out, "Stop that nigger; stop that nigger;" while the poor panting slave, in almost breathless accents, was repeating, "I did not steal the meat—I did not steal the meat." The poor man at last took refuge in the river. The whites who were in pursuit of him, run on board of one of the boats to see if they could discover him. They finally espied him under the bow of the steamboat Trenton. They got a pike-pole, and tried to drive him from his hiding place. When they would strike at him, he would dive under the water. The water was so cold, that it soon became evident that he must come out or be drowned.

While they were trying to drive him from under the bow of the boat

27. Theodore Weld (1803–95) was a prominent leader in the early antislavery movement. He coauthored with the Grimké sisters one its most influential texts, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839).

or drown him, he would in broken and imploring accents say, "I did not steal the meat; I did not steal the meat. My master lives up the river. I want to see my master. I did not steal the meat. Do let me go home to master." After punching him, and striking him over the head for some time, he at last sunk in the water, to rise no more alive.

On the end of the pike-pole with which they were striking him was a hook which caught in his clothing, and they hauled him up on the bow of the boat. Some said he was dead, others said he was "*playing possum*," while others kicked him to make him get up, but it was of no use — he was dead.

As soon as they became satisfied of this, they commenced leaving, one after another. One of the hands on the boat informed the captain that they had killed the man, and that the dead body was lying on the deck. The captain came on deck, and said to those who were remaining, "You have killed this nigger; now take him off of my boat." The captain's name was Hart. The dead body was dragged on shore and left there. I went on board of the boat where our gang of slaves were, and during the whole night my mind was occupied with what I had seen. Early in the morning, I went on shore to see if the dead body remained there. I found it in the same position that it was left the night before. I watched to see what they would do with it. It was left there until between eight and nine o'clock, when a cart, which takes up the trash out of the streets, came along, and the body was thrown in, and in a few minutes more was covered over with dirt which they were removing from the streets. During the whole time, I did not see more than six or seven persons around it, who, from their manner, evidently regarded it as no uncommon occurrence.

During our stay in the city, I met with a young white man with whom I was well acquainted in St. Louis. He had been sold into slavery, under the following circumstances. His father was a drunkard, and very poor, with a family of five or six children. The father died, and left the mother to take care of and provide for the children as best she might. The eldest was a boy, named Burrill, about thirteen years of age, who did chores in a store kept by Mr. Riley, to assist his mother in procuring a living for the family. After working with him two years, Mr. Riley took him to New

Orleans to wait on him while in that city on a visit, and when he returned to St. Louis, he told the mother of the boy that he had died with the yellow fever. Nothing more was heard from him, no one supposing him to be alive. I was much astonished when Burrill told me his story. Though I sympathized with him, I could not assist him. We were both slaves. He was poor, uneducated, and without friends; and if living, is, I presume, still held as a slave.

After selling out this cargo of human flesh, we returned to St. Louis, and my time was up with Mr. Walker. I had served him one year, and it was the longest year I ever lived.

Chapter 8

I was sent home, and was glad enough to leave the service of one who was tearing the husband from the wife, the child from the mother, and the sister from the brother,—but a trial more severe and heart-rending than any which I had yet met with awaited me. My dear sister had been sold to a man who was going to Natchez, and was lying in jail awaiting the hour of his departure. She had expressed her determination to die, rather than go to the far south, and she was put in jail for safe keeping. I went to the jail the same day that I arrived, but as the jailor was not in, I could not see her.

I went home to my master, in the country, and the first day after my return, he came where I was at work, and spoke to me very politely. I knew from his appearance that something was the matter. After talking about my several journeys to New Orleans with Mr. Walker, he told me that he was hard pressed for money, and as he had sold my mother and all her children except me, he thought it would be better to sell me than any other one, and that as I had been used to living in the city, he thought it probable that I would prefer it to a country life. I raised up my head, and looked him full in the face. When my eyes caught his, he immediately looked to the ground. After a short pause, I said,

"Master, mother has often told me that you are a near relative of mine,

and I have often heard you admit the fact; and after you have hired me out, and received, as I once heard you say, nine hundred dollars for my services,—after receiving this large sum, will you sell me to be carried to New Orleans or some other place?"

"No," said he, "I do not intend to sell you to a negro trader. If I had wished to have done that, I might have sold you to Mr. Walker for a large sum, but I would not sell you to a negro trader. You may go to the city, and find you a good master."

"But," said I, "I cannot find a good master in the whole city of St. Louis."

"Why?" said he.

"Because there are no good masters in the State."

"Do you not call me a good master?"

"If you were, you would not sell me."

"Now I will give you one week to find a master in, and surely you can do it in that time."

The price set by my evangelical master upon my soul and body was the trifling sum of five hundred dollars. I tried to enter into some arrangement by which I might purchase my freedom; but he would enter into no such arrangement.

I set out for the city with the understanding that I was to return in a week with some one to become my new master. Soon after reaching the city, I went to the jail, to learn if I could once more see my sister; but could not gain admission. I then went to mother, and learned from her that the owner of my sister intended to start for Natchez in a few days.

I went to the jail again the next day, and Mr. Simonds, the keeper, allowed me to see my sister for the last time. I cannot give a just description of the scene at that parting interview. Never, never can be erased from my heart the occurrences of that day! When I entered the room where she was, she was seated in one corner, alone. There were four other women in the same room, belonging to the same man. He had purchased them, he said, for his own use. She was seated with her face towards the door where I entered, yet she did not look up until I walked up to her. As soon as she observed me, she sprung up, threw her arms around my

neck, leaned her head upon my breast, and, without uttering a word, burst into tears. As soon as she recovered herself sufficiently to speak, she advised me to take mother, and try to get out of slavery. She said there was no hope for herself, — that she must live and die a slave. After giving her some advice, and taking from my finger a ring and placing it upon hers, I bade her farewell forever, and returned to my mother, and then and there made up my mind to leave for Canada as soon as possible.

I had been in the city nearly two days, and as I was to be absent only a week, I thought best to get on my journey as soon as possible. In conversing with mother, I found her unwilling to make the attempt to reach a land of liberty, but she counselled me to get my liberty if I could. She said, as all her children were in slavery, she did not wish to leave them. I could not bear the idea of leaving her among those pirates, when there was a prospect of being able to get away from them. After much persuasion, I succeeded in inducing her to make the attempt to get away.

The time fixed for our departure was the next night. I had with me a little money that I had received, from time to time, from gentlemen for whom I had done errands. I took my scanty means and purchased some dried beef, crackers and cheese, which I carried to mother, who had provided herself with a bag to carry it in. I occasionally thought of my old master, and of my mission to the city to find a new one. I waited with the most intense anxiety for the appointed time to leave the land of slavery, in search of a land of liberty.

The time at length arrived, and we left the city just as the clock struck nine. We proceeded to the upper part of the city, where I had been two or three times during the day, and selected a skiff to carry us across the river. The boat was not mine, nor did I know to whom it did belong; neither did I care. The boat was fastened with a small pole, which, with the aid of a rail, I soon loosened from its moorings. After hunting round and finding a board to use as an oar, I turned to the city, and bidding it a long farewell, pushed off my boat. The current running very swift, we had not reached the middle of the stream before we were directly opposite the city.

We were soon upon the Illinois shore, and, leaping from the boat,

turned it adrift, and the last I saw of it, it was going down the river at good speed. We took the main road to Alton, and passed through just at daylight, when we made for the woods, where we remained during the day. Our reason for going into the woods was, that we expected that Mr. Mansfield (the man who owned my mother) would start in pursuit of her as soon as he discovered that she was missing. He also knew that I had been in the city looking for a new master, and we thought probably he would go out to my master's to see if he could find my mother, and in so doing, Dr. Young might be led to suspect that I had gone to Canada to find a purchaser.

We remained in the woods during the day, and as soon as darkness overshadowed the earth, we started again on our gloomy way, having no guide but the NORTH STAR. We continued to travel by night, and secrete ourselves in woods by day; and every night, before emerging from our hiding-place, we would anxiously look for our friend and leader,—the NORTH STAR.

Chapter 9

As we travelled towards a land of liberty, my heart would at times leap for joy. At other times, being, as I was, almost constantly on my feet, I felt as though I could travel no further. But when I thought of slavery with its Democratic whips—its Republican chains—its evangelical blood-hounds, and its religious slave-holders—when I thought of all this paraphernalia of American Democracy and Religion behind me, and the prospect of liberty before me, I was encouraged to press forward, my heart was strengthened, and I forgot that I was tired or hungry.

On the eighth day of our journey, we had a very heavy rain, and in a few hours after it commenced, we had not a dry thread upon our bodies. This made our journey still more unpleasant. On the tenth day, we found ourselves entirely destitute of provisions, and how to obtain any we could not tell. We finally resolved to stop at some farmhouse, and try to get something to eat. We had no sooner determined to do this, than

we went to a house, and asked them for some food. We were treated with great kindness, and they not only gave us something to eat, but gave us provisions to carry with us. They advised us to travel by day, and lye by at night. Finding ourselves about one hundred and fifty miles from St. Louis, we concluded that it would be safe to travel by daylight, and did not leave the house until the next morning. We travelled on that day through a thickly settled country, and through one small village. Though we were fleeing from a land of oppression, our hearts were still there. My dear sister and two beloved brothers were behind us, and the idea of giving them up, and leaving them forever, made us feel sad. But with all this depression of heart, the thought that I should one day be free, and call my body my own, buoyed me up, and made my heart leap for joy. I had just been telling mother how I should try to get employment as soon as we reached Canada, and how I intended to purchase us a little farm, and how I would earn money enough to buy sister and brothers, and how happy we would be in our own FREE HOME,—when three men came up on horseback, and ordered us to stop.

I turned to the one who appeared to be the principal man, and asked him what he wanted. He said he had a warrant to take us up. The three immediately dismounted, and one took from his pocket a handbill, advertising us as runaways, and offering a reward of two hundred dollars for our apprehension, and delivery in the city of St. Louis.[28] The advertisement had been put out by Isaac Mansfield and John Young.

While they were reading the advertisement, mother looked me in the face, and burst into tears. A cold chill ran over me, and such a sensation I never experienced before, and I hope never to again. They took out a rope and tied me, and we were taken back about six miles, to the house of the individual who appeared to be the leader. We reached there about seven o'clock in the evening, had supper, and were separated for

28. Masters of runaway slaves commonly had handbills prepared at local printing shops to aid in the return of their property. These crudely printed sheets typically provided slave catchers such basic information about runaways as physical descriptions, identifying marks, and behavioral tendencies.

the night. Two men remained in the room during the night. Before the family retired to rest, they were all called together to attend prayers. The man who but a few hours before had bound my hands together with a strong cord, read a chapter from the Bible, and then offered up prayer, just as though God sanctioned the act he had just committed upon a poor panting, fugitive slave.

The next morning, a blacksmith came in, and put a pair of handcuffs on me, and we started on our journey back to the land of whips, chains and Bibles. Mother was not tied, but was closely watched at night. We were carried back in a wagon, and after four days travel, we came in sight of St. Louis. I cannot describe my feelings upon approaching the city.

As we were crossing the ferry, Mr. Wiggins, the owner of the ferry, came up to me, and inquired what I had been doing that I was in chains. He had not heard that I had run away. In a few minutes, we were on the Missouri side, and were taken directly to the jail. On the way thither, I saw several of my friends, who gave me a nod of recognition as I passed them. After reaching the jail, we were locked up in different apartments.

Chapter 10

I had been in jail but a short time when I heard that my master was sick, and nothing brought more joy to my heart than that intelligence. I prayed fervently for him — not for his recovery, but for his death. I knew he would be exasperated at having to pay for my apprehension, and knowing his cruelty, I feared him. While in jail, I learned that my sister Elizabeth, who was in prison when we left the city, had been carried off four days before our arrival.

I had been in jail but a few hours when three negro-traders, learning that I was secured thus for running away, came to my prison-house and looked at me, expecting that I would be offered for sale. Mr. Mansfield, the man who owned mother, came into the jail as soon as Mr. Jones, the

man who arrested us, informed him that he had brought her back. He told her that he would not whip her, but would sell her to a negro-trader, or take her to New Orleans himself. After being in jail about one week, master sent a man to take me out of jail, and send me home. I was taken out and carried home, and the old man was well enough to sit up. He had me brought into the room where he was, and as I entered, he asked me where I had been? I told him I had acted according to his orders. He had told me to look for a master, and I had been to look for one. He answered that he did not tell me to go to Canada to look for a master. I told him that as I had served him faithfully, and had been the means of putting a number of hundreds of dollars into his pocket, I thought I had a right to my liberty. He said he had promised my father that I should not be sold to supply the New Orleans market, or he would sell me to a negro-trader.

I was ordered to go into the field to work, and was closely watched by the overseer during the day, and locked up at night. The overseer gave me a severe whipping on the second day that I was in the field. I had been at home but a short time, when master was able to ride to the city; and on his return, he informed me that he had sold me to Samuel Willi, a merchant tailor. I knew Mr. Willi. I had lived with him three or four months some years before, when he hired me of my master.

Mr. Willi was not considered by his servants as a very bad man, nor was he the best of masters. I went to my new home, and found my new mistress very glad to see me. Mr. Willi owned two servants before he purchased me,—Robert and Charlotte. Robert was an excellent white-washer, and hired his time from his master, paying him one dollar per day, besides taking care of himself. He was known in the city by the name of Bob Music. Charlotte was an old woman, who attended to the cooking, washing, &c. Mr. Willi was not a wealthy man, and did not feel able to keep many servants around his house; so he soon decided to hire me out, and as I had been accustomed to service in steamboats, he gave me the privilege of finding such employment.

I soon secured a situation on board the steamer Otto, Capt. J. B. Hill,

which sailed from St. Louis to Independence, Missouri.[29] My former master, Dr. Young, did not let Mr. Willi know that I had run away, or he would not have permitted me to go on board a steamboat. The boat was not quite ready to commence running, and therefore I had to remain with Mr. Willi. But during this time, I had to undergo a trial, for which I was entirely unprepared. My mother, who had been in jail since her return until the present time, was now about being carried to New Orleans, to die on a cotton, sugar, or rice plantation!

I had been several times to the jail, but could obtain no interview with her. I ascertained, however, the time the boat in which she was to embark would sail, and as I had not seen mother since her being thrown into prison, I felt anxious for the hour of sailing to come. At last, the day arrived when I was to see her for the first time after our painful separation, and, for aught that I knew, for the last time in this world!

At about ten o'clock in the morning I went on board of the boat, and found her there in company with fifty or sixty other slaves. She was chained to another woman. On seeing me, she immediately dropped her head upon her heaving bosom. She moved not, neither did she weep. Her emotions were too deep for tears. I approached, threw my arms around her neck, kissed her, and fell upon my knees, begging her forgiveness, for I thought myself to blame for her sad condition; for if I had not persuaded her to accompany me, she would not then have been in chains.

She finally raised her head, looked me in the face (and such a look none but an angel can give!) and said, "*My dear son, you are not to blame for my being here. You have done nothing more nor less than your duty. Do not, I pray you, weep for me. I cannot last long upon a cotton plantation. I feel that my heavenly master will soon call me home, and then I shall be out of the hands of the slave-holders!*"

I could bear no more — my heart struggled to free itself from the human form. In a moment she saw Mr. Mansfield coming toward that part

29. That is, the ship steamed up the Missouri River to Independence, then the westernmost point of navigability on the river.

of the boat, and she whispered into my ear, "*My child, we must soon part to meet no more this side of the grave. You have ever said that you would not die a slave; that you would be a freeman. Now try to get your liberty! You will soon have no one to look after but yourself!*" and just as she whispered the last sentence into my ear, Mansfield came up to me, and with an oath, said, "Leave here this instant; you have been the means of my losing one hundred dollars to get this wench back," — at the same time kicking me with a heavy pair of boots. As I left her, she gave one shriek, saying, "God be with you!" It was the last time that I saw her, and the last word I heard her utter.

I walked on shore. The bell was tolling. The boat was about to start. I stood with a heavy heart, waiting to see her leave the wharf. As I thought of my mother, I could but feel that I had lost

> " — the glory of my life,
> My blessing and my pride!
> I half forgot the name of slave,
> When she was by my side."[30]

Chapter 11

The love of liberty that had been burning in my bosom, had well nigh gone out. I felt as though I was ready to die. The boat moved gently from the wharf, and while she glided down the river, I realized that my mother was indeed

> "Gone, — gone, — sold and gone,
> To the rice swamp dank and lone!"[31]

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30. Slightly modified from a stanza of "The Bereaved Father," by the American abolitionist poet Elizabeth Margaret Chandler (1807–34).

31. This couplet comes from John Greenleaf Whittier's "The Farewell," which Douglass quoted two years earlier in chapter 8 of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Whittier (1807–92), a popular New England poet, was committed to the antislavery movement and was its most esteemed white U.S. poet.

After the boat was out of sight, I returned home; but my thoughts were so absorbed in what I had witnessed, that I knew not what I was about half of the time. Night came, but it brought no sleep to my eyes.

In a few days, the boat upon which I was to work being ready, I went on board to commence. This employment suited me better than living in the city, and I remained until the close of navigation; though it proved anything but pleasant. The captain was a drunken, profligate, hard-hearted creature, not knowing how to treat himself, or any other person.

The boat, on its second trip, brought down Mr. Walker, the man of whom I have spoken in a previous chapter, as hiring my time. He had between one and two hundred slaves, chained and manacled. Among them was a man that formerly belonged to my old master's brother, Aaron Young. His name was Solomon. He was a preacher, and belonged to the same church with his master. I was glad to see the old man. He wept like a child when he told me how he had been sold from his wife and children.

The boat carried down, while I remained on board, four or five gangs of slaves. Missouri, though a comparatively new State, is very much engaged in raising slaves to supply the southern market. In a former chapter, I have mentioned that I was once in the employ of a slave-trader, or driver, as he is called at the south. For fear that some may think that I have misrepresented a slave-driver, I will here give an extract from a paper published in a slaveholding State, Tennessee, called the "Millennial Trumpeter."[32]

"Droves of negroes, chained together in dozens and scores, and handcuffed, have been driven through our country in numbers far surpassing any previous year, and these vile slave-drivers and dealers are swarming like buzzards around a carrion. Through this county, you cannot pass a few miles in the great roads without having every feeling of humanity insulted and lacerated by this spectacle, nor can you go into any county or

32. A newspaper of that name is listed in the Blount County, Tennessee, records for the mid-1830s.

any neighborhood, scarcely, without seeing or hearing of some of these despicable creatures, called negro-drivers.

"Who is a negro-driver? One whose eyes dwell with delight on lacerated bodies of helpless men, women and children; whose soul feels diabolical raptures at the chains, and hand-cuffs, and cart-whips, for inflicting tortures on weeping mothers torn from helpless babes, and on husbands and wives torn asunder forever!"

Dark and revolting as is the picture here drawn, it is from the pen of one living in the midst of slavery. But though these men may cant about negro-drivers, and tell what despicable creatures they are, who is it, I ask, that supplies them with the human beings that they are tearing asunder? I answer, as far as I have any knowledge of the State where I came from, that those who raise slaves for the market are to be found among all classes, from Thomas H. Benton down to the lowest political demagogue, who may be able to purchase a woman for the purpose of raising stock, and from the Doctor of Divinity down to the most humble lay member in the church.[33]

It was not uncommon in St. Louis to pass by an auction-stand, and behold a woman upon the auction-block, and hear the seller crying out, "*How much is offered for this woman? She is a good cook, good washer, a good obedient servant. She has got religion!*" Why should this man tell the purchasers that she has religion? I answer, because in Missouri, and as far as I have any knowledge of slavery in the other States, the religious teaching consists in teaching the slave that he must never strike a white man; that God made him for a slave; and that, when whipped, he must not find fault,—for the Bible says, "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes!"[34] And slaveholders find such religion very profitable to them.

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33. Thomas Hart Benton (1782–1858) represented Missouri in the U.S. Senate from 1821 to 1851. Although a steadfast expansionist and slaveholding Democrat, he moderated his views on slavery in his later years.

34. This verse (Luke 12:47) was one of the most frequently cited biblical texts in the rhetorical war about slavery. It recurs in various works by Brown.

After leaving the steamer Otto, I resided at home, in Mr. Willi's family, and again began to lay my plans for making my escape from slavery. The anxiety to be a freeman would not let me rest day or night. I would think of the northern cities that I had heard so much about; — of Canada, where so many of my acquaintances had found refuge. I would dream at night that I was in Canada, a freeman, and on waking in the morning, weep to find myself so sadly mistaken.

"I would think of Victoria's domain,
And in a moment I seemed to be there!
But the fear of being taken again,
Soon hurried me back to despair."

Mr. Willi treated me better than Dr. Young ever had; but instead of making me contented and happy, it only rendered me the more miserable, for it enabled me better to appreciate liberty. Mr. Willi was a man who loved money as most men do, and without looking for an opportunity to sell me, he found one in the offer of Captain Enoch Price, a steamboat owner and commission merchant, living in the city of St. Louis. Captain Price tendered seven hundred dollars, which was two hundred more than Mr. Willi had paid. He therefore thought best to accept the offer. I was wanted for a carriage driver, and Mrs. Price was very much pleased with the captain's bargain. His family consisted besides of one child. He had three servants besides myself — one man and two women.

Mrs. Price was very proud of her servants, always keeping them well dressed, and as soon as I had been purchased, she resolved to have a new carriage. And soon one was procured, and all preparations were made for a turn-out in grand style, I being the driver.

One of the female servants was a girl some eighteen or twenty years of age, named Maria. Mrs. Price was very soon determined to have us united, if she could so arrange matters. She would often urge upon me the necessity of having a wife, saying that it would be so pleasant for me to take one in the same family! But getting married, while in slavery, was the last of my thoughts; and had I been ever so inclined, I should not

have married Maria, as my love had already gone in another quarter. Mrs. Price soon found out that her efforts at this match-making between Maria and myself would not prove successful. She also discovered (or thought she had) that I was rather partial to a girl named Eliza, who was owned by Dr. Mills. This induced her at once to endeavor the purchase of Eliza, so great was her desire to get me a wife!

Before making the attempt, however, she deemed it best to talk to me a little upon the subject of love, courtship, and marriage. Accordingly one afternoon she called me into her room — telling me to take a chair and sit down. I did so, thinking it rather strange, for servants are not very often asked thus to sit down in the same room with the master or mistress. She said that she had found out that I did not care enough about Maria to marry her. I told her that was true. She then asked me if there was not a girl in the city that I loved. Well, now, this was coming into too close quarters with me! People, generally, don't like to tell their love stories to everybody that may think fit to ask about them, and it was so with me. But, after blushing awhile and recovering myself, I told her that I did not want a wife. She then asked me, if I did not think something of Eliza. I told her that I did. She then said that if I wished to marry Eliza, she would purchase her if she could.

I gave but little encouragement to this proposition, as I was determined to make another trial to get my liberty, and I knew that if I should have a wife, I should not be willing to leave her behind; and if I should attempt to bring her with me, the chances would be difficult for success. However, Eliza was purchased, and brought into the family.

Chapter 12

But the more I thought of the trap laid by Mrs. Price to make me satisfied with my new home, by getting me a wife, the more I determined never to marry any woman on earth until I should get my liberty. But this secret I was compelled to keep to myself, which placed me in a very

critical position. I must keep upon good terms with Mrs. Price and Eliza. I therefore promised Mrs. Price that I would marry Eliza; but said that I was not then ready. And I had to keep upon good terms with Eliza, for fear that Mrs. Price would find out that I did not intend to get married.

I have here spoken of marriage, and it is very common among slaves themselves to talk of it. And it is common for slaves to be married; or at least have the marriage ceremony performed. But there is no such thing as slaves being lawfully married. There has never yet a case occurred where a slave has been tried for bigamy. The man may have as many women as he wishes, and the women as many men; and the law takes no cognizance of such acts among slaves. And in fact some masters, when they have sold the husband from the wife, compel her to take another.

There lived opposite Captain Price's, Doctor Farrar, well known in St. Louis. He sold a man named Ben, to one of the traders. He also owned Ben's wife, and in a few days he compelled Sally (that was her name) to marry Peter, another man belonging to him. I asked Sally "why she married Peter so soon after Ben was sold." She said, "because master made her do it."

Mr. John Calvert, who resided near our place, had a woman named Lavinia. She was quite young, and a man to whom she was about to be married was sold, and carried into the country near St. Charles, about twenty miles from St. Louis. Mr. Calvert wanted her to get a husband; but she had resolved not to marry any other man, and she refused. Mr. Calvert whipped her in such a manner that it was thought she would die. Some of the citizens had him arrested, but it was soon hushed up. And that was the last of it. The woman did not die, but it would have been the same if she had.

Captain Price purchased me in the month of October, and I remained with him until December, when the family made a voyage to New Orleans, in a boat owned by himself, and named the "Chester." I served on board, as one of the stewards. On arriving at New Orleans, about the middle of the month, the boat took in freight for Cincinnati; and it was decided that the family should go up the river in her, and what was of more interest to me, I was to accompany them.

The long looked for opportunity to make my escape from slavery was near at hand.

Captain Price had some fears as to the propriety of taking me near a free State, or a place where it was likely I could run away, with a prospect of liberty. He asked me if I had ever been in a free State. "Oh yes," said I, "I have been in Ohio; my master carried me into that State once, but I never liked a free State."

It was soon decided that it would be safe to take me with them, and what made it more safe, Eliza was on the boat with us, and Mrs. Price, to try me, asked if I thought as much as ever of Eliza. I told her that Eliza was very dear to me indeed, and that nothing but death should part us. It was the same as if we were married. This had the desired effect. The boat left New Orleans, and proceeded up the river.

I had at different times obtained little sums of money, which I had reserved for a "rainy day." I procured some cotton cloth, and made me a bag to carry provisions in. The trials of the past were all lost in hopes for the future. The love of liberty, that had been burning in my bosom for years, and had been well nigh extinguished, was now resuscitated. At night, when all around was peaceful, I would walk the decks, meditating upon my happy prospects.

I should have stated, that before leaving St. Louis, I went to an old man named Frank, a slave, owned by a Mr. Sarpee. This old man was very distinguished (not only among the slave population, but also the whites) as a fortune-teller. He was about seventy years of age, something over six feet high, and very slender. Indeed, he was so small around his body that it looked as though it was not strong enough to hold up his head.

Uncle Frank was a very great favorite with the young ladies, who would go to him in great numbers to get their fortunes told. And it was generally believed that he could really penetrate into the mysteries of futurity. Whether true or not, he had the *name*, and that is about half of what one needs in this gullible age. I found Uncle Frank seated in the chimney corner, about ten o'clock at night. As soon as I entered, the old man left his seat. I watched his movement as well as I could by the dim light of

the fire. He soon lit a lamp, and coming up, looked me full in the face, saying, "Well, my son, you have come to get uncle to tell your fortune, have you?" "Yes," said I. But how the old man should know what I had come for, I could not tell. However, I paid the fee of twenty-five cents, and he commenced by looking into a gourd, filled with water. Whether the old man was a prophet, or the son of a prophet, I cannot say; but there is one thing certain, many of his predictions were verified.

I am no believer in soothsaying; yet I am sometimes at a loss to know how Uncle Frank could tell so accurately what would occur in the future. Among the many things he told was one which was enough to pay me for all the trouble of hunting him up. It was that *I should be free!* He further said, that in trying to get my liberty, I would meet with many severe trials. I thought to myself, any fool could tell me that!

The first place in which we landed in a free State was Cairo, a small village at the mouth of the Ohio river.[35] We remained here but a few hours, when we proceeded to Louisville. After unloading some of the cargo, the boat started on her upward trip. The next day was the first of January. I had looked forward to New Year's day as the commencement of a new era in the history of my life. I had decided upon leaving the peculiar institution that day.

During the last night that I served in slavery, I did not close my eyes a single moment. When not thinking of the future, my mind dwelt on the past. The love of a dear mother, a dear sister, and three dear brothers, yet living, caused me to shed many tears. If I could only have been assured of their being dead, I should have felt satisfied; but I imagined I saw my dear mother in the cotton-field, followed by a merciless task-master, and no one to speak a consoling word to her! I beheld my dear sister in the hands of a slave-driver, and compelled to submit to his cruelty! None but one placed in such a situation can for a moment imagine the intense agony to which these reflections subjected me.

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35. Cairo, a town in southern Illinois, sits at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. As his steamship traveled past the town and steered up the Ohio River toward Louisville and Cincinnati, Brown was entering more favorable grounds for escape.

Chapter 13

At last the time for action arrived. The boat landed at a point which appeared to me the place of all others to start from.[36] I found that it would be impossible to carry anything with me, but what was upon my person. I had some provisions, and a single suit of clothes, about half worn. When the boat was discharging her cargo, and the passengers engaged carrying their baggage on and off shore, I improved the opportunity to convey myself with my little effects on land. Taking up a trunk, I went up the wharf, and was soon out of the crowd. I made directly for the woods, where I remained until night, knowing well that I could not travel, even in the State of Ohio, during the day, without danger of being arrested.

I had long since made up my mind that I would not trust myself in the hands of any man, white or colored. The slave is brought up to look upon every white man as an enemy to him and his race; and twenty-one years in slavery had taught me that there were traitors, even among colored people.[37] After dark, I emerged from the woods into a narrow path, which led me into the main travelled road. But I knew not which way to go. I did not know North from South, East from West. I looked in vain for the North Star; a heavy cloud hid it from my view. I walked up and down the road until near midnight, when the clouds disappeared, and I welcomed the sight of my friend, — truly the slave's friend, — the North Star!

As soon as I saw it, I knew my course, and before daylight I travelled twenty or twenty-five miles. It being in the winter, I suffered intensely from the cold; being without an overcoat, and my other clothes rather thin for the season. I was provided with a tinder-box, so that I could make up a fire when necessary. And but for this, I should certainly have frozen to death; for I was determined not to go to any house for shelter.

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36. Brown's unnamed location is Cincinnati.

37. Brown's dating seems inaccurate. He was more likely only nineteen at the time of his escape.

I knew of a man belonging to Gen. Ashly, of St. Louis, who had run away near Cincinnati, on the way to Washington, but had been caught and carried back into slavery; and I felt that a similar fate awaited me, should I be seen by any one. I travelled at night, and lay by during the day.

On the fourth day, my provisions gave out, and then what to do I could not tell. Have something to eat, I must; but how to get it was the question! On the first night after my food was gone, I went to a barn on the road-side, and there found some ears of corn. I took ten or twelve of them, and kept on my journey. During the next day, while in the woods, I roasted my corn and feasted upon it, thanking God that I was so well provided for.

My escape to a land of freedom now appeared certain, and the prospects of the future occupied a great part of my thoughts. What should be my occupation, was a subject of much anxiety to me; and the next thing what should be my name? I have before stated that my old master, Dr. Young, had no children of his own, but had with him a nephew, the son of his brother, Benjamin Young. When this boy was brought to Doctor Young, his name being William, the same as mine, my mother was ordered to change mine to something else. This, at the time, I thought to be one of the most cruel acts that could be committed upon my rights; and I received several very severe whippings for telling people that my name was William, after orders were given to change it. Though young, I was old enough to place a high appreciation upon my name. It was decided, however, to call me "Sandford," and this name I was known by, not only upon my master's plantation, but up to the time that I made my escape. I was sold under the name of Sandford.

But as soon as the subject came to my mind, I resolved on adopting my old name of William, and let Sandford go by the board, for I always hated it. Not because there was anything peculiar in the name; but because it had been forced upon me. It is sometimes common at the south, for slaves to take the name of their masters. Some have a legitimate right to do so. But I always detested the idea of being called by the name of

either of my masters. And as for my father, I would rather have adopted the name of "Friday," and been known as the servant of some Robinson Crusoe, than to have taken his name. So I was not only hunting for my liberty, but also hunting for a name; though I regarded the latter as of little consequence, if I could but gain the former. Travelling along the road, I would sometimes speak to myself, sounding my name over, by way of getting used to it, before I should arrive among civilized human beings. On the fifth or sixth day, it rained very fast, and it froze about as fast as it fell, so that my clothes were one glare of ice. I travelled on at night until I became so chilled and benumbed—the wind blowing into my face—that I found it impossible to go any further, and accordingly took shelter in a barn, where I was obliged to walk about to keep from freezing.

I have ever looked upon that night as the most eventful part of my escape from slavery. Nothing but the providence of God, and that old barn, saved me from freezing to death. I received a very severe cold, which settled upon my lungs, and from time to time my feet had been frost-bitten, so that it was with difficulty I could walk. In this situation I travelled two days, when I found that I must seek shelter somewhere, or die.

The thought of death was nothing frightful to me, compared with that of being caught, and again carried back into slavery. Nothing but the prospect of enjoying liberty could have induced me to undergo such trials, for

> "Behind I left the whips and chains, Before me were sweet
> Freedom's plains!"

This, and this alone, cheered me onward. But I at last resolved to seek protection from the inclemency of the weather, and therefore I secured myself behind some logs and brush, intending to wait there until some one should pass by; for I thought it probable that I might see some colored person, or, if not, some one who was not a slaveholder; for I had an idea that I should know a slaveholder as far as I could see him.

Chapter 14

The first person that passed was a man in a buggy-wagon. He looked too genteel for me to hail him. Very soon, another passed by on horseback. I attempted speaking to him, but fear made my voice fail me. As he passed, I left my hiding-place, and was approaching the road, when I observed an old man walking towards me, leading a white horse. He had on a broad-brimmed hat and a very long coat, and was evidently walking for exercise. As soon as I saw him, and observed his dress, I thought to myself, "You are the man that I have been looking for!" Nor was I mistaken. He was the very man!

On approaching me, he asked me, "if I was not a slave." I looked at him some time, and then asked him "if he knew of any one who would help me, as I was sick." He answered that he would; but again asked, if I was not a slave. I told him I was. He then said that I was in a very pro-slavery neighborhood, and if I would wait until he went home, he would get a covered wagon for me. I promised to remain. He mounted his horse, and was soon out of sight.

After he was gone, I meditated whether to wait or not; being apprehensive that he had gone for some one to arrest me. But I finally concluded to remain until he should return; removing some few rods to watch his movements. After a suspense of an hour and a half or more, he returned with a two horse covered-wagon, such as are usually seen under the shed of a Quaker meeting-house on Sundays and Thursdays; for the old man proved to be a Quaker of the George Fox stamp.[38]

38. George Fox (1624–91) was the founder of the English Protestant sect called the Society of Friends, nicknamed Quakers (mockingly, at first, by their opponents). The Quakers were well known in both Great Britain and the United States for their devotion to pacifism and antislavery, although the group remained subject to mockery even in Brown's time. Herman Melville, for instance, satirized the group as hypocrites in chapter 16 of *Moby-Dick* by casting the owners of the whaling ship *Pequod* as "fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with a vengeance." Brown's experience of Quakers was more positive and his treatment of them in this autobiography and in *Clotel* more complimentary.

He took me to his house, but it was some time before I could be induced to enter it; not until the old lady came out, did I venture into the house. I thought I saw something in the old lady's cap that told me I was not only safe, but welcome, in her house. I was not, however, prepared to receive their hospitalities. The only fault I found with them was their being too kind. I had never had a white man to treat me as an equal, and the idea of a white lady waiting on me at the table was still worse! Though the table was loaded with the good things of this life, I could not eat. I thought if I could only be allowed the privilege of eating in the kitchen, I should be more than satisfied!

Finding that I could not eat, the old lady, who was a "Thompsonian," made me a cup of "composition," or "number six"; but it was so strong and hot, that I called it "*number seven!*"[39] However, I soon found myself at home in this family. On different occasions, when telling these facts, I have been asked how I felt upon finding myself regarded as a man by a white family; especially just having run away from one. I cannot say that I have ever answered the question yet.

The fact that I was in all probability a freeman, sounded in my ears like a charm. I am satisfied that none but a slave could place such an appreciation upon liberty as I did at that time. I wanted to see mother and sister, that I might tell them "I was free!" I wanted to see my fellow slaves in St. Louis, and let them know that the chains were no longer upon my limbs. I wanted to see Captain Price, and let him learn from my own lips that I was no more a chattel, but a man! I was anxious, too, thus to inform Mrs. Price that she must get another coachman. And I wanted to see Eliza more than I did either Mr. or Mrs. Price!

The fact that I was a freeman — could walk, talk, eat and sleep as a man, and no one to stand over me with the blood-clotted cowhide — all this made me feel that I was not myself.

The kind friend that had taken me in was named Wells Brown. He

39. A "Thompsonian" was a follower of Samuel Thompson (1769–1843), a self-taught New Hampshire holistic doctor and herbalist. Brown is expressing his skepticism about Thompsonian herbal remedies such as "number six."

was a devoted friend of the slave; but was very old, and not in the enjoyment of good health. After being by the fire awhile, I found that my feet had been very much frozen. I was seized with a fever which threatened to confine me to my bed. But my Thompsonian friends soon raised me, treating me as kindly as if I had been one of their own children. I remained with them twelve or fifteen days, during which time they made me some clothing, and the old gentleman purchased me a pair of boots.

I found that I was about fifty or sixty miles from Dayton, in the State of Ohio, and between one and two hundred miles from Cleaveland, on Lake Erie, a place I was desirous of reaching on my way to Canada. This I know will sound strangely to the ears of people in foreign lands, but it is nevertheless true. An American citizen was fleeing from a Democratic, Republican, Christian government, to receive protection under the monarchy of Great Britain. While the people of the United States boast of their freedom, they at the same time keep three millions of their own citizens in chains; and while I am seated here in sight of Bunker Hill Monument, writing this narrative, I am a slave, and no law, not even in Massachusetts, can protect me from the hands of the slaveholder![40]

Before leaving this good Quaker friend, he inquired what my name was besides William. I told him that I had no other name. "Well," said he, "thee must have another name. Since thee has got out of slavery, thee has become a man, and men always have two names."

I told him that he was the first man to extend the hand of friendship to me, and I would give him the privilege of naming me.

"If I name thee," said he, "I shall call thee Wells Brown, after myself."

"But," said I, "I am not willing to lose my name of William. As it was taken from me once against my will, I am not willing to part with it again upon any terms."

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40. Brown had moved to Boston in 1847, where he completed the final sections of this book. He lived on the northern side of Beacon Hill, at the time the center of the city's African American community.

"Then," said he, "I will call thee William Wells Brown."[41]

"So be it," said I; and I have been known by that name ever since I left the house of my first white friend, Wells Brown.

After giving me some little change, I again started for Canada. In four days I reached a public house, and went in to warm myself. I there learned that some fugitive slaves had just passed through the place. The men in the bar-room were talking about it, and I thought that it must have been myself they referred to, and I was therefore afraid to start, fearing they would seize me; but I finally mustered courage enough, and took my leave. As soon as I was out of sight, I went into the woods, and remained there until night, when I again regained the road, and travelled on until the next day.

Not having had any food for nearly two days, I was faint with hunger, and was in a dilemma what to do, as the little cash supplied me by my adopted father, and which had contributed to my comfort, was now all gone. I however concluded to go to a farm-house, and ask for something to eat. On approaching the door of the first one presenting itself, I knocked, and was soon met by a man who asked me what I wanted. I told him that I would like something to eat. He asked where I was from, and where I was going. I replied that I had come some way, and was going to Cleaveland.

After hesitating a moment or two, he told me that he could give me nothing to eat, adding, "that if I would work, I could get something to eat."

I felt bad, being thus refused something to sustain nature, but did not dare tell him that I was a slave.

Just as I was leaving the door, with a heavy heart, a woman, who proved to be the wife of this gentleman, came to the door, and asked her husband what I wanted? He did not seem inclined to inform her. She

41. This elaborate scene of naming not only echoes the biblical story in which Jacob is renamed Israel after wrestling with an angel of God (Genesis 32:24–28) but replays more broadly the practice of renaming adopted by multitudes of ex-slaves following emancipation.

therefore asked me herself. I told her that I had asked for something to eat. After a few other questions, she told me to come in, and that she would give me something to eat.

I walked up to the door, but the husband remained in the passage, as if unwilling to let me enter.

She asked him two or three times to get out of the way, and let me in. But as he did not move, she pushed him on one side, bidding me walk in! I was never before so glad to see a woman push a man aside! Ever since that act, I have been in favor of "woman's rights!"

After giving me as much food as I could eat, she presented me with ten cents, all the money then at her disposal, accompanied with a note to a friend, a few miles further on the road. Thanking this angel of mercy from an overflowing heart, I pushed on my way, and in three days arrived at Cleaveland, Ohio.

Being an entire stranger in this place, it was difficult for me to find where to stop. I had no money, and the lake being frozen, I saw that I must remain until the opening of navigation, or go to Canada by way of Buffalo. But believing myself to be somewhat out of danger, I secured an engagement at the Mansion House, as a table waiter, in payment for my board. The proprietor, however, whose name was E. M. Segur, in a short time, hired me for twelve dollars per month; on which terms I remained until spring, when I found good employment on board a lake steamboat.

I purchased some books, and at leisure moments perused them with considerable advantage to myself. While at Cleaveland, I saw, for the first time, an anti-slavery newspaper. It was the "*Genius of Universal Emancipation*," published by Benjamin Lundy, and though I had no home, I subscribed for the paper.[42] It was my great desire, being out of slavery myself, to do what I could for the emancipation of my brethren

42. Benjamin Lundy (1789–1839) was an early leader of the antislavery movement and the founding editor of one of its first newspapers, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (1821–39).

yet in chains, and while on Lake Erie, I found many opportunities of "helping their cause along."

It is well known, that a great number of fugitives make their escape to Canada, by way of Cleaveland; and while on the lake, I always made arrangement to carry them on the boat to Buffalo or Detroit, and thus effect their escape to the "promised land." The friends of the slave, knowing that I would transport them without charge, never failed to have a delegation when the boat arrived at Cleaveland. I have sometimes had four or five on board, at one time.

In the year 1842, I conveyed, from the first of May to the first of December, sixty-nine fugitives over Lake Erie to Canada. In 1843, I visited Malden, in Upper Canada, and counted seventeen, in that small village, who owed their escape to my humble efforts.[43]

Soon after coming North, I subscribed for the Liberator, edited by that champion of freedom, William Lloyd Garrison. I labored a season to promote the temperance cause among the colored people, but for the last three years, have been pleading for the victims of American slavery.

WILLIAM WELLS BROWN.
Boston, Mass., June, 1847.

43. A sizable number of fugitive slaves settled in communities such as Malden, Ontario, during the antebellum generation because slavery had been abolished throughout the British Empire

Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown

Shall tongues be mute when deeds are wrought
Which well might shame extremest Hell?
Shall freemen lack th' indignant thought?
Shall Mercy's bosom cease to swell?
Shall Honour bleed?—shall Truth succumb?
Shall pen, and press, and *soul* be dumb?

—WHITTIER[1]

William Wells Brown, the subject of this narrative, was born a slave in Lexington, Kentucky, not far from the residence of the late Hon. Henry Clay.[2] His mother was the slave of Doctor John Young. His father was a slaveholder, and, besides being a near relation of his master, was connected with the Wicklief family, one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most aristocratic of the Kentucky planters.[3] Dr. Young was the owner of forty or fifty slaves, whose chief employment was in cultivating tobacco, hemp, corn, and flax. The Doctor removed from Lexington, when William was five or six years old, to the state of Missouri, and commenced farming in a beautiful and fertile valley, within a mile of the Missouri river.[4]

The text of *Narrative of the Life and Escape of William Wells Brown* comes from the original edition of *Clotel* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853), for which it served as the author's introduction.

1. From Whittier's "Stanzas for the Times."

2. Brown felt a particular animosity toward his fellow Kentuckian, one of the most influential politicians of his era. Clay (1771–1852), who served in a variety of senior governmental positions, including U.S. representative, senator, and secretary of state, held reputedly moderate views on race and slavery. These included reverence for racial purity and support for African colonization, positions that Brown found repulsive.

3. Brown's accounts of his lineage varied from one autobiographical text to the next. The most colorful association was that his mother was the daughter of Daniel Boone (in "Memoir of the Author," the introduction to *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*).

4. Brown is probably mistaken about his age at the time of the move. The move took place in 1816, when he was more likely only two.

Here the slaves were put to work under a harsh and cruel overseer named Cook. A finer situation for a farm could not have been selected in the state. With climate favourable to agriculture, and soil rich, the products came in abundance. At an early age William was separated from his mother, she being worked in the field, and he as a servant in his master's medical department. When about ten years of age, the young slave's feelings were much hurt at hearing the cries of his mother, while being flogged by the negro driver for being a few minutes behind the other hands in reaching the field. He heard her cry, "Oh, pray! oh, pray! oh, pray!" These are the words which slaves generally utter when imploring mercy at the hands of their oppressors. The son heard it, though he was some way off. He heard the crack of the whip and the groans of his poor mother. The cold chill ran over him, and he wept aloud; but he was a slave like his mother, and could render her no assistance. He was taught by the most bitter experience, that nothing could be more heart-rending than to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured by unfeeling men, and to hear her cries, and not be able to render the least aid. When William was twelve years of age, his master left his farm and took up his residence near St. Louis. The Doctor having more hands than he wanted for his own use, William was let out to a Mr. Freeland, an innkeeper. Here the young slave found himself in the hands of a most cruel and heartless master. Freeland was one of the real chivalry of the South; besides being himself a slaveholder, he was a horse-racer, cock-fighter, gambler, and, to crown the whole, an inveterate drunkard. What else but bad treatment could be expected from such a character? After enduring the tyrannical and inhuman usage of this man for five or six months, William resolved to stand it no longer, and therefore ran away, like other slaves who leave their masters, owing to severe treatment; and not knowing where to flee, the young fugitive went into the forest, a few miles from St. Louis. He had been in the woods but a short time, when he heard the barking and howling of dogs, and was soon satisfied that he was pursued by the negro dogs; and, aware of their ferocious nature, the fugitive climbed a tree, to save himself from being torn to pieces. The hounds were soon at the trunk of the tree, and remained there,

howling and barking, until those in whose charge they were came up. The slave was ordered down, tied, and taken home. Immediately on his arrival there, he was, as he expected, tied up in the smoke-house, and whipped till Freeland was satisfied, and then smoked with tobacco stems. This the slaveholder called "*Virginia play*." After being well whipped and smoked, he was again set to work. William remained with this monster a few months longer, and was then let out to Elijah P. Lovejoy, who years after became the editor of an abolition newspaper, and was murdered at Alton, Illinois, by a mob of slaveholders from the adjoining state of Missouri. The system of letting out slaves is one among the worst of the evils of slavery. The man who hires a slave, looks upon him in the same light as does the man who hires a horse for a limited period; he feels no interest in him, only to get the worth of his money. Not so with the man who owns the slave; he regards him as so much property, of which care should be taken. After being let out to a steamer as an under-steward, William was hired by James Walker, a slave-trader. Here the subject of our memoir was made superintendent of the gangs of slaves that were taken to the New Orleans market. In this capacity, William had opportunities, far greater than most slaves, of acquiring knowledge of the different phases of the "*peculiar institution*." Walker was a negro speculator, who was amassing a fortune by trading in the bones, blood, and nerves, of God's children. The thoughts of such a traffic causes us to exclaim with the poet,

> "— Is there not some chosen curse,
> Some hidden thunder in the stores of heaven,
> Red with uncommon wrath, to blast the man
> Who gains his fortune from the blood of souls?"[5]

Between fifty and sixty slaves were chained together, put on board a steam-boat bound for New Orleans, and started on the voyage. New and strange scenes began to inspire the young slave with the hope of escaping

5. Brown had used this quotation, from Joseph Addison's *Cato*, as the epigraph to *Narrative of William W. Brown* (see p. 5).

to a land of freedom. There was in the boat a large room on the lower deck in which the slaves were kept, men and women promiscuously, all chained two and two together, not even leaving the poor slaves the privilege of choosing their partners. A strict watch was kept over them, so that they had no chance of escape. Cases had occurred in which slaves had got off their chains and made their escape at the landing-places, while the boat stopped to take in wood. But with all their care they lost one woman who had been taken from her husband and children, and having no desire to live without them, in the agony of her soul jumped overboard and drowned herself. Her sorrows were greater than she could bear; slavery and its cruel inflictions had broken her heart. She, like William, sighed for freedom, but not the freedom which even British soil confers and inspires, but freedom from torturing pangs, and overwhelming grief.

At the end of the week they arrived at New Orleans, the place of their destination. Here the slaves were placed in a negro pen, where those who wished to purchase could call and examine them. The negro pen is a small yard surrounded by buildings, from fifteen to twenty feet wide, with the exception of a large gate with iron bars. The slaves are kept in the buildings during the night, and turned into the pen during the day. After the best of the gang were sold off, the balance was taken to the Exchange coffee-house auction-rooms, and sold at public auction. After the sale of the last slave, William and Mr. Walker left New Orleans for St. Louis.

After they had been at St. Louis a few weeks another cargo of human flesh was made up. There were amongst the lot several old men and women, some of whom had grey locks. On their way down to New Orleans William had to prepare the old slaves for market. He was ordered to shave off the old men's whiskers, and to pluck out the grey hairs where they were not too numerous; where they were, he coloured them with a preparation of blacking with a blacking brush. After having gone through the blacking process, they looked ten or fifteen years younger. William, though not well skilled in the use of scissors and razor, performed the office of the barber tolerably. After the sale of this gang of negroes they returned to St. Louis, and a second cargo was made up. In this lot was

a woman who had a child at the breast, yet was compelled to travel through the interior of the country on foot with the other slaves. In a published memoir of his life,[6] William says, "The child cried during the most of the day, which displeased Mr. Walker, and he told the mother that if her child did not stop crying, he would stop its mouth. After a long and weary journey under a burning sun, we put up for the night at a country inn. The following morning, just as they were about to start, the child again commenced crying. Walker stepped up to her and told her to give the child to him. The mother tremblingly obeyed. He took the child by one arm, as any one would a cat by the leg, and walked into the house where they had been staying, and said to the lady, 'Madam, I will make you a present of this little nigger; it keeps making such a noise that I can't bear it.' 'Thank you, sir,' said the lady. The mother, as soon as she saw that her child was to be left, ran up to Mr. Walker, and falling on her knees, begged of him in an agony of despair, to let her have her child. She clung round his legs so closely, that for some time he could not kick her off; and she cried, 'O my child, my child. Master, do let me have my dear, dear child. Oh! do, do. I will stop its crying, and love you for ever if you will only let me have my child again.' But her prayers were not heeded, they passed on, and the mother was separated from her child for ever.

"After the woman's child had been given away, Mr. Walker rudely commanded her to retire into the ranks with the other slaves. Women who had children were not chained, but those who had none were. As soon as her child was taken she was chained to the gang."

Some time after this, Walker bought a woman who had a blind child; it being considered worthless, it was given to the trader by the former owner of the woman on the score of humanity, he saying that he wished to keep mother and child together. At first Walker declined taking the child, saying that it would be too much trouble, but the mother wishing to have her boy with her, begged him to take it, promising to carry it

6. The reference is to the 1847 *Narrative of William W. Brown*, a source from which he quotes liberally in this autobiography.

the whole distance in her arms. Consequently he took the child, and the gang started on their route to the nearest steamboat landing, which was above one hundred miles. As might have been expected, the woman was unable to carry the boy and keep up with the rest of the gang. They put up at night at a small town, and the next morning, when about to start, Walker took the little boy from its mother and sold it to the innkeeper for the small sum of *one dollar.* The poor woman was so frantic at the idea of being separated from her only child, that it seemed impossible to get her to leave it. Not until the chains were put upon her limbs, and she fastened to the other slaves, could they get her to leave the spot. By main force this slave mother was compelled to go on and leave her child behind. Some days after, a lady from one of the free states was travelling the same road and put up at the same inn: she saw the child the morning after her arrival, and heard its history from one of the slaves, which was confirmed by the innkeeper's wife. A few days after, the following poem appeared in one of the newspapers, from the pen of the lady who had seen the blind child:—

"Come back to me, mother! why linger away
From thy poor little blind boy, the long weary day!
I mark every footstep, I list to each tone,
And wonder my mother should leave me alone!
There are voices of sorrow and voices of glee,
But there's no one to joy or to sorrow with me:
For each hath of pleasure and trouble his share,
And none for the poor little blind boy will care.

"My mother, come back to me! close to thy breast
Once more let thy poor little blind one be pressed;
Once more let me feel thy warm breath on my cheek,
And hear thee in accents of tenderness speak!
O mother! I've no one to love me—no heart
Can bear like thy own in my sorrows a part;
No hand is so gentle, no voice is so kind!
Oh! none like a mother can cherish the blind!

"Poor blind one! no mother thy wailing can bear,
No mother can hasten to banish thy fear;
For the slave-owner drives her, o'er mountain and wild,
And for one paltry dollar hath sold thee, poor child!
Ah! who can in language of mortals reveal
The anguish that none but a mother can feel,
When man in his vile lust of mammon hath trod
On her child, who is stricken and smitten of God!

"Blind, helpless, forsaken, with strangers alone,
She hears in her anguish his piteous moan,
As he eagerly listens — but listens in vain,
To catch the loved tones of his mother again!
The curse of the broken in spirit shall fall
On the wretch who hath mingled this wormwood and gall,
And his gain like a mildew shall blight and destroy,
Who hath torn from his mother the little blind boy."[7]

The thought that man can so debase himself as to treat a fellow-creature as here represented, is enough to cause one to blush at the idea that such men are members of a civilised and Christian nation.

Nothing was more grievous to the sensitive feelings of William, than seeing the separation of families by the slave-trader: husbands taken from their wives, and mothers from their children, without the least appearance of feeling on the part of those who separated them. While at New Orleans, on one occasion, William saw a slave murdered. The circumstances were as follows: — In the evening, between seven and eight o'clock, a slave came running down the levee, followed by several men and boys. The whites were crying out, "Stop that nigger! stop that nig-

7. Brown was a musically gifted individual who sometimes sang on the antislavery platform and had an expert knowledge of antislavery songs. He probably encountered this song, based on a poem by Margaret Baily (1807–59), in George Clark's collection *The Liberty Minstrel* (New York: Leavitt and Alden, 1845). Brown included it in his own compendium, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*.

ger!" while the poor panting slave, in almost breathless accents, was repeating, "I did not steal the meat — I did not steal the meat." The poor man at last took refuge in the river. The whites who were in pursuit of him, ran on board of one of the boats to see if they could discover him. They finally espied him under the bow of the steamboat "Trenton." They got a pike-pole, and tried to drive him from his hiding-place. When they struck at him he would dive under the water. The water was so cold, that it soon became evident that he must come out or be drowned.

While they were trying to drive him from under the boat or drown him, he in broken and imploring accents said, "I did not steal the meat; I did not steal the meat. My master lives up the river. I want to see my master. I did not steal the meat. Do let me go home to master." After punching and striking him over the head for some time, he at last sunk in the water, to rise no more alive.

On the end of the pike-pole with which they had been striking him was a hook, which caught in his clothing, and they hauled him up on the bow of the boat. Some said he was dead; others said he was "playing 'possum"; while others kicked him to make him get up; but it was of no use — he was dead.

As soon as they became satisfied of this they commenced leaving one after another. One of the hands on the boat informed the captain that they had killed the man, and that the dead body was lying on the deck. The captain, whose name was Hart, came on deck, and said to those who were remaining, "You have killed this nigger; now take him off my boat." The dead body was dragged on shore and left there. William went on board of the boat where the gang of slaves were, and during the whole night his mind was occupied with what he had seen. Early in the morning he went on shore to see if the dead body remained there. He found it in the same position that it was left the night before. He watched to see what they would do with it. It was left there until between eight and nine o'clock, when a cart, which took up the trash from the streets, came along, and the body was thrown in, and in a few minutes more was covered over with dirt, which they were removing from the streets.

At the expiration of the period of his hiring with Walker, William re-

turned to his master, rejoiced to have escaped an employment as much against his own feelings as it was repugnant to human nature. But this joy was of short duration. The Doctor wanted money, and resolved to sell William's sister and two brothers. The mother had been previously sold to a gentleman residing in the city of St. Louis. William's master now informed him that he intended to sell him, and, as he was his own nephew, he gave him the privilege of finding some one to purchase him who would treat him better than if he was sold on the auction block. William tried to make some arrangement by which he could purchase his own freedom, but the old Doctor would hear nothing of the kind. If there is one thing more revolting in the trade of human flesh than another, it is the selling of one's own blood relations.

He accordingly set out for the city in search of a new master. When he arrived there, he proceeded to the gaol with the hope of seeing his sister, but was again disappointed.[8] On the following morning he made another attempt, and was allowed to see her once, for the last time. When he entered the room where she was seated in one corner, alone and disconsolate, there were four other women in the room, belonging to the same man, who were bought, the gaoler said, for the master's own use.

William's sister was seated with her face towards the door when he entered, but her gaze was transfixed on nothingness, and she did not look up when he walked up to her; but as soon as she observed him she sprang up, threw her arms around his neck, leaned her head upon his breast, and without uttering a word, in silent, indescribable sorrow, burst into tears. She remained so for some minutes, but when she recovered herself sufficiently to speak, she urged him to take his mother immediately, and try to get to the land of freedom. She said there was no hope for herself, she must live and die a slave. After giving her some advice, and taking a ring from his finger, he bade her farewell for ever. Reader, did ever a fair sister of thine go down to the grave prematurely,

8. *Gaol* is an antiquated form of *jail* (as *gaoler* is of *jailer*). British spellings were used in this edition, which was published in London.

if so, perchance, thou hast drank deeply from the cup of sorrow? But how infinitely better is it for a sister to "go into the silent land" with her honour untarnished, but with bright hopes, than for her to be sold to sensual slave-holders.[9]

William had been in the city now two days, and as he was to be absent for only a week, it was well that he should make the best use of his time if he intended to escape. In conversing with his mother, he found her unwilling to make the attempt to reach the land of liberty, but she advised him by all means to get there himself if he possibly could. She said, as all her children were in slavery, she did not wish to leave them; but he loved his mother so intensely, that he could not think of leaving without her. He consequently used all his simple eloquence to induce her to fly with him, and at last he prevailed. They consequently fixed upon the next night as the time for their departure. The time at length arrived, and they left the city just as the clock struck nine. Having found a boat, they crossed the river in it. Whose boat it was he did not know; neither did he care: when it had served his purpose, he turned it adrift, and when he saw it last, it was going at a good speed down the river. After walking in the main road as fast as they could all night, when the morning came they made for the woods, and remained there during the day, but when night came again, they proceeded on their journey with nothing but the North Star to guide them. They continued to travel by night, and to bury themselves in the silent solitudes of the forest by day. Hunger and fatigue could not stop them, for the prospect of freedom at the end of the journey nerved them up. The very thought of leaving slavery, with its democratic whips, republican chains, and bloodhounds, caused the hearts of the weary fugitives to leap with joy. After travelling ten nights and hiding in the woods during the day for fear of being arrested and taken back, they thought they might with safety go the rest of their way by daylight. In nearly all the free states there are men who make a business of catching runaway slaves and returning them to their

9. The phrase quoted is from "Song of the Silent Land," by Longfellow.

owners for the reward that may be offered; some of these were on the alert for William and his mother, for they had already seen the runaways advertised in the St. Louis newspapers.[10]

All at once they heard the click of a horse's hoof, and looking back saw three men on horseback galloping towards them. They soon came up, and demanded them to stop. The three men dismounted, arrested them on a warrant, and showed them a handbill, offering two hundred dollars for their apprehension and delivery to Dr. Young and Isaac Mansfield in St. Louis.

While they were reading the handbill, William's mother looked him in the face, and burst into tears. "A cold chill ran over me," says he, "and such a sensation I never experienced before, and I trust I never shall again." They took out a rope and tied him, and they were taken back to the house of the individual who appeared to be the leader. They then had something given them to eat, and were separated. Each of them was watched over by two men during the night. The religious characteristic of the American slaveholder soon manifested itself, as before the family retired to rest they were all called together to attend prayers; and the very man who, but a few hours before, had arrested poor panting, fugitive slaves, now read a chapter from the Bible and offered a prayer to God; as if that benignant and omnipotent One consecrated the infernal act he had just committed.

The next morning they were chained and handcuffed, and started back to St. Louis. A journey of three days brought the fugitives again to the place they had left twelve days previously with the hope that they would never return. They were put in prison to await the orders of their owners. When a slave attempts to escape and fails, he feels sure of either being severely punished, or sold to the negro traders and taken to the far south, there to be worked up on a cotton, sugar, or rice plantation. This William and his mother dreaded. While they were in suspense as to what would be their fate, news came to them that the mother had been

10. Advertisements for runaway slaves and servants were a commonplace in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American newspapers.

sold to a slave speculator. William was soon sold to a merchant residing in the city, and removed to his new owner's dwelling. In a few days the gang of slaves, of which William's mother was one, were taken on board a steamer to be carried to the New Orleans market. The young slave obtained permission from his new owner to go and take a last farewell of his mother. He went to the boat, and found her there, chained to another woman, and the whole number of slaves, amounting to some fifty or sixty, chained in the same manner. As the son approached his mother she moved not, neither did she weep; her emotions were too deep for tears. William approached her, threw his arms around her neck, kissed her, fell upon his knees begging her forgiveness, for he thought he was to blame for her sad condition, and if he had not persuaded her to accompany him she might not have been in chains then.

She remained for some time apparently unimpressionable, tearless, sighless, but in the innermost depths of her heart moved mighty passions. William says, "She finally raised her head, looked me in the face, and such a look none but an angel can give, and said, 'My dear son, you are not to blame for my being here. You have done nothing more nor less than your duty. Do not, I pray you, weep for me; I cannot last long upon a cotton plantation. I feel that my heavenly Master will soon call me home, and then I shall be out of the hands of the slaveholders.' I could hear no more — my heart struggled to free itself from the human form. In a moment she saw Mr. Mansfield, her master, coming toward that part of the boat, and she whispered in my ear, 'My child, we must soon part to meet no more on this side of the grave. You have ever said that you would not die a slave; that you would be a freeman. Now try to get your liberty! You will soon have no one to look after but yourself!' and just as she whispered the last sentence into my ear, Mansfield came up to me, and with an oath said, 'Leave here this instant; you have been the means of my losing one hundred dollars to get this wench back' — at the same time kicking me with a heavy pair of boots. As I left her she gave one shriek, saying, 'God be with you!' It was the last time that I saw her, and the last word I heard her utter.

"I walked on shore. The bell was tolling. The boat was about to start. I

stood with a heavy heart, waiting to see her leave the wharf. As I thought of my mother, I could but feel that I had lost

> 'The glory of my life,
> My blessing and my pride!
> I half forgot the name of slave,
> When she was by my side.'[11]

"The love of liberty that had been burning in my bosom had well-nigh gone out. I felt as though I was ready to die. The boat moved gently from the wharf, and while she glided down the river, I realised that my mother was indeed

> 'Gone — gone — sold and gone,
> To the rice swamp, dark and lone!'[12]

"After the boat was out of sight I returned home; but my thoughts were so absorbed in what I had witnessed, that I knew not what I was about. Night came, but it brought no sleep to my eyes." When once the love of freedom is born in the slave's mind, it always increases and brightens, and William having heard so much about Canada, where a number of his acquaintances had found a refuge and a home, he heartily desired to join them. Building castles in the air in the daytime; incessantly thinking of freedom, he would dream of the land of liberty, but on waking in the morning would weep to find it but a dream.

> "He would dream of Victoria's domain,
> And in a moment he seemed to be there;
> But the fear of being taken again,
> Soon hurried him back to despair."[13]

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11. Slightly modified from a stanza of "The Bereaved Father," by the American abolitionist poet Elizabeth Margaret Chandler (1807–34).

12. From "The Farewell" by Whittier — here slightly misquoted from Brown's 1847 *Narrative* (see p. 45).

13. This quote is also from the first *Narrative*, but Brown has rewritten it here, from first to third person.

Having been for some time employed as a servant in an hotel, and being of a very active turn, William's new owner resolved to let him out on board a steamboat. Consequently the young slave was hired out to the steamer St. Louis, and soon after sold to Captain Enoch Price, the owner of that boat.[14] Here he was destined to remain but a short period, as Mrs. Price wanted a carriage-driver, and had set her heart upon William for that purpose.

Scarcely three months had elapsed from the time that William became the property of Captain Price, ere that gentleman's family took a pleasure trip to New Orleans, and William accompanied them. From New Orleans the family proceeded to Louisville. The hope of escape again dawned upon the slave's mind, and the trials of the past were lost in hopes for the future. The love of liberty, which had been burning in his bosom for years, and which at times had been well nigh extinguished, was now resuscitated. Hopes nurtured in childhood, and strengthened as manhood dawned, now spread their sails to the gales of his imagination. At night, when all around was peaceful, and in the mystic presence of the everlasting starlight, he would walk the steamer's decks, meditating on his happy prospects, and summoning up gloomy reminiscences of the dear hearts he was leaving behind him. When not thinking of the future his mind would dwell on the past. The love of a dear mother, a dear and affectionate sister, and three brothers yet living, caused him to shed many tears. If he could only be assured of their being dead, he would have been comparatively happy; but he saw in imagination his mother in the cotton-field, followed by a monster task-master, and no one to speak a consoling word to her. He beheld his sister in the hands of the slave-driver, compelled to submit to his cruelty, or, what was unutterably worse, his lust; but still he was far away from them, and could not do anything for them if he remained in slavery; consequently he resolved, and consecrated the resolve with a prayer, that he would start on the first opportunity.

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14. Price was Brown's final master — and the master of legal record at the time that Brown wrote this autobiography. Brown reversed the power relations between them by dragging Price into his narrative in its final pages.

That opportunity soon presented itself. When the boat got to the wharf where it had to stay for some time, at the first convenient moment Brown made towards the woods, where he remained until night-time. He dared not walk during the day, even in the state of Ohio; he had seen so much of the perfidy of white men, and resolved, if possible, not to get into their hands. After darkness covered the world, he emerged from his hiding-place; but he did not know east from west, or north from south; clouds hid the North Star from his view. In this desolate condition he remained for some hours, when the clouds rolled away, and his friend, with its shining face — the North Star — welcomed his sight. True as the needle to the pole he obeyed its attractive beauty, and walked on till daylight dawned.

It was winter-time; the day on which he started was the 1st of January, and, as it might be expected, it was intensely cold; he had no overcoat, no food, no friend, save the North Star, and the God which made it. How ardently must the love of freedom burn in the poor slave's bosom, when he will pass through so many difficulties, and even look death in the face, in winning his birth-right, freedom. But what crushed the poor slave's heart in his flight most was, not the want of food or clothing, but the thought that every white man was his deadly enemy. Even in the free states the prejudice against colour is so strong, that there appears to exist a deadly antagonism between the white and coloured races.

William in his flight carried a tinder-box with him, and when he got very cold he would gather together dry leaves and stubble and make a fire, or certainly he would have perished. He was determined to enter into no house, fearing that he might meet a betrayer.

It must have been a picture which would have inspired an artist, to see the fugitive roasting the ears of corn that he found or took from barns during the night, at solitary fires in the deep solitudes of woods.

The suffering of the fugitive was greatly increased by the cold, from the fact of his having just come from the warm climate of New Orleans. Slaves seldom have more than one name, and William was not an exception to this, and the fugitive began to think of an additional name. A

heavy rain of three days, in which it froze as fast as it fell, and by which the poor fugitive was completely drenched, and still more chilled, added to the depression of his spirits already created by his weary journey. Nothing but the fire of hope burning within his breast could have sustained him under such overwhelming trials,

> "Behind he left the whip and chains,
> Before him were sweet Freedom's plains."[15]

Through cold and hunger, William was now ill, and he could go no further. The poor fugitive resolved to seek protection, and accordingly hid himself in the woods near the road, until some one should pass. Soon a traveller came along, but the slave dared not speak. A few moments more and a second passed, the fugitive attempted to speak, but fear deprived him of voice. A third made his appearance. He wore a broad-brimmed hat and a long coat, and was evidently walking only for exercise. William scanned him well, and though not much skilled in physiognomy, he concluded he was the man. William approached him, and asked him if he knew any one who would help him, as he was sick? The gentleman asked whether he was not a slave. The poor slave hesitated; but, on being told that he had nothing to fear, he answered, "Yes." The gentleman told him he was in a pro-slaving neighbourhood, but, if he would wait a little, he would go and get a covered waggon, and convey him to his house. After he had gone, the fugitive meditated whether he should stay or not, being apprehensive that the broad-brimmed gentleman had gone for some one to assist him: he however concluded to remain.

After waiting about an hour — an hour big with fate to him — he saw the covered waggon making its appearance, and no one on it but the person he before accosted. Trembling with hope and fear, he entered the waggon, and was carried to the person's house. When he got there, he still halted between two opinions, whether he should enter or take to his

15. From "The Flying Slave," an anonymously composed poem and song that Brown had included in *The Anti-Slavery Harp*.

heels; but he soon decided after seeing the glowing face of the wife. He saw something in her that bid him welcome, something that told him he would not be betrayed.

He soon found that he was under the shed of a Quaker, and a Quaker of the George Fox stamp. He had heard of Quakers and their kindness; but was not prepared to meet with such hospitality as now greeted him. He saw nothing but kind looks, and heard nothing but tender words. He began to feel the pulsations of a new existence. White men always scorned him, but now a white benevolent woman felt glad to wait on him; it was a revolution in his experience. The table was loaded with good things, but he could not eat. If he were allowed the privilege of sitting in the kitchen, he thought he could do justice to the viands. The surprise being over his appetite soon returned.

"I have frequently been asked," says William, "how I felt upon finding myself regarded as a man by a white family; especially having just run away from one. I cannot say that I have ever answered the question yet. The fact that I was, in all probability, a freeman, sounded in my ears like a charm. I am satisfied that none but a slave could place such an appreciation upon liberty as I did at that time. I wanted to see my mother and sister, that I might tell them that 'I was free!' I wanted to see my fellow-slaves in St. Louis, and let them know that the chains were no longer upon my limbs. I wanted to see Captain Price, and let him learn from my own lips that I was no more a chattel, but a MAN. I was anxious, too, thus to inform Mrs. Price that she must get another coachman, and I wanted to see Eliza more than I did Mr. Price or Mrs. Price. The fact that I was a freeman — could walk, talk, eat, and sleep as a man, and no one to stand over me with the blood-clotted cow-hide — all this made me feel that I was not myself."

The kind Quaker, who so hospitably entertained William, was called Wells Brown. He remained with him about a fortnight, during which time he was well fed and clothed. Before leaving, the Quaker asked him what was his name besides William? The fugitive told him he had no other. "Well," said he, "thee must have another name. Since thee has got out of slavery, thee has become a man, and men always have two names."

William told him that as he was the first man to extend the hand of friendship to him, he would give him the privilege of naming him.

"If I name thee," said he, "I shall call thee Wells Brown, like myself."

"But," said he, "I am not willing to lose my name of William. It was taken from me once against my will, and I am not willing to part with it on any terms."

"Then," said the benevolent man, "I will call thee William Wells Brown."

"So be it," said William Wells Brown, and he has been known by this name ever since.

After giving the newly-christened freeman "a name," the Quaker gave him something to aid him to get "a local habitation." So, after giving him some money, Brown again started for Canada. In four days he reached a public-house, and went in to warm himself. He soon found that he was not out of the reach of his enemies. While warming himself, he heard some men in an adjoining bar-room talking about some runaway slaves. He thought it was time to be off, and, suiting the action to the thought, he was soon in the woods out of sight. When night came, he returned to the road and walked on; and so, for two days and two nights, till he was faint and ready to perish of hunger.

In this condition he arrived in the town of Cleveland, Ohio, on the banks of Lake Erie, where he determined to remain until the spring of the year, and then to try and reach Canada. Here he was compelled to work merely for his food. "Having lived in that way," said he in a speech at a public meeting in Exeter Hall, "for some weeks, I obtained a job, for which I received a shilling.[16] This was not only the only shilling I had, but it was the first I had received after obtaining my freedom, and that shilling made me feel, indeed, as if I had a considerable stock in hand. What to do with my shilling I did not know. I would not put it into the

16. London's Exeter Hall was a favorite assembly place of British abolitionists. Brown frequently attended and sometimes addressed antislavery meetings there, although the text of this address has not yet been identified.

bankers' hands, because, if they would have received it, I would not trust them. I would not lend it out, because I was afraid I should not get it back again. I carried the shilling in my pocket for some time, and finally resolved to lay it out; and after considerable thinking upon the subject, I laid out 6*d*. for a spelling-book, and the other 6*d*. for sugar candy or barley sugar.[17] Well, now, you will all say that the one 6*d*. for the spelling-book was well laid out; and I am of opinion that the other was well laid out too; for the family in which I worked for my bread had two little boys, who attended the school every day, and I wanted to convert them into teachers; so I thought that nothing would act like a charm so much as a little barley sugar. The first day I got my book and stock in trade, I put the book into my bosom, and went to saw wood in the wood-house on a very cold day. One of the boys, a little after four o'clock, passed through the wood-house with a bag of books. I called to him, and I said to him, 'Johnny, do you see this?' taking a stick of barley sugar from my pocket and showing it to him. Says he, 'Yes; give me a taste of it.' Said I, 'I have got a spellingbook too,' and I showed that to him. 'Now,' said I, 'if you come to me in my room, and teach me my A, B, C, I will give you a whole stick.' 'Very well,' said he, 'I will; but let me taste it.' 'No; I can't.' 'Let me have it now.' Well, I thought I had better give him a little taste, until the right time came; and I marked the barley sugar about a quarter of an inch down, and told him to bite that far and no farther. He made a grab, and bit half the stick, and ran off laughing. I put the other piece in my pocket, and after a little while the other boy, little David, came through the wood-house with his books. I said nothing about the barley sugar, or my wish to get education. I knew the other lad would communicate the news to him. In a little while he returned, and said, 'Bill, John says you have got some barley sugar.' 'Well,' I said, 'what of that?' 'He said you gave him some; give me a little taste.' 'Well, if you come to-night and help me to learn my letters, I will give you a whole stick.' 'Yes; but let me taste it.' 'Ah! but you want to bite it.' 'No, I don't, but just let me

17. The unit of currency is English, naturally enough, for his local audience; 6d (or 6 pence) equals one-half shilling.

taste it.' Well, I thought I had better show it to him. 'Now,' said he, 'let me touch my tongue against it.' I thought then that I had better give him a taste, but I would not trust him so far as I trusted John; so I called him to me, and got his head under my arm, and took him by the chin, and told him to hold out his tongue; and as he did so, I drew the barley sugar over very lightly. He said, 'That's very nice; just draw it over again.' 'I could stand here and let you draw it across my tongue all day.' The night came on; the two boys came out of their room up into the attic where I was lodging, and there they commenced teaching me the letters of the alphabet. We all laid down upon the floor, covered with the same blanket; and first one would teach me a letter, and then the other, and I would pass the barley sugar from one side to the other. I kept those two boys on my sixpenny worth of barley sugar for about three weeks. Of course I did not let them know how much I had. I first dealt it out to them a quarter of a stick at a time. I worked along in that way, and before I left that place where I was working for my bread, I got so that I could spell. I had a book that had the word *baker* in it, and the boys used to think that when they got so far as that, they were getting on pretty well. I had often passed by the school-house, and stood and listened at the window to hear them spell, and I knew that when they could spell *baker* they thought something of themselves; and I was glad when I got that far. Before I left that place I could read. Finally, from that I went on until I could write. How do you suppose I first commenced writing? for you will understand that up to the present time I never spent a day in school in my life, for I had no money to pay for schooling, so that I had to get my learning first from one and then from another. I carried a piece of chalk in my pocket, and whenever I met a boy I would stop him and take out my chalk and get at a board fence and then commence. First I made some flourishes with no meaning, and called a boy up, and said, 'Do you see that? Can you beat that writing?' Said he, 'That's not writing.' Well, I wanted to get so as to write my own name. I had got out of slavery with only one name. While escaping, I received the hospitality of a very good man, who had spared part of his name to me, and finally my name got pretty long, and I wanted to be able to write it. 'Now, what do you call that?' said the boy,

looking at my flourishes. I said, 'Is not that *William Wells Brown*?' 'Give me the chalk,' says he, and he wrote out in large letters '*William Wells Brown*,' and I marked up the fence for nearly a quarter of a mile, trying to copy, till I got so that I could write my name. Then I went on with my chalking, and, in fact, all board fences within half a mile of where I lived were marked over with some kind of figures I had made, in trying to learn how to write. I next obtained an arithmetic, and then a grammar, and I stand here to-night, without having had a day's schooling in my life." Such were some of the efforts made by a fugitive slave to obtain for himself an education. Soon after his escape, Brown was married to a free coloured woman, by whom he has had three daughters, one of whom died in infancy.[18] Having tasted the sweets of freedom himself, his great desire was to extend its blessing to his race, and in the language of the poet he would ask himself,

> "Is true freedom but to break
> Fetters for our own dear sake
> And with leathern hearts forget
> That we owe mankind a debt?
>
> "No! true freedom is to share
> All the chains our brothers wear,
> And with heart and hand to be
> Earnest to make others free."[19]

While acting as a servant to one of the steamers on Lake Erie, Brown often took fugitives from Cleveland and other ports to Buffalo, or Detroit, from either of which places they could cross to Canada in an hour. During the season of 1842, this fugitive slave conveyed no less than *sixty-nine* runaway slaves across Lake Erie, and placed them safe on the soil of Canada. The following interesting account of Brown's first going into business

18. Brown married Elizabeth Schooner (d. 1851), a free woman of color, in Cleveland in 1834. They lived together until separating acrimoniously in 1847, when Brown took custody of their two daughters and moved with them to Boston.

19. From "Stanzas on Freedom," by Lowell.

for himself, which we transcribe from his "Three Years in Europe," will show the energy of the man.[20] He says, "In the autumn of 1835, having been cheated out of the previous summer's earnings by the captain of the steamer in which I had been employed running away with the money, I was, like the rest of the men, left without any means of support during the winter, and therefore had to seek employment in the neighbouring towns. I went to the town of Monroe in the state of Michigan, and while going through the principal streets looking for work, I passed the door of the only barber in the town, whose shop appeared to be filled with persons waiting to be shaved.[21] As there was but one man at work, and as I had, while employed in the steamer, occasionally shaved a gentleman who could not perform that office himself, it occurred to me that I might get employment here as a journeyman barber. I therefore made immediate application for work, but the barber told me he did not need a hand. But I was not to be put off so easily, and after making several offers to work cheap, I frankly told him, that if he would not employ me, I would get a room near him, and set up an opposition establishment. This threat, however, made no impression on the barber; and as I was leaving, one of the men, who were waiting to be shaved, said, 'If you want a room in which to commence business, I have one on the opposite side of the street.' This man followed me out; we went over, and I looked at the room. He strongly urged me to set up, at the same time promising to give me his influence. I took the room, purchased an old table, two chairs, got a pole with a red stripe painted around it, and the next day opened, with a sign over the door, 'Fashionable Hair-dresser from New York, Emperor of the West.' I need not add that my enterprise was very annoying to the 'shop over the way,' especially my sign, which happened to be the most extensive part of the concern. Of course I had to tell all who came in, that my neighbour on the opposite side did not keep clean towels, that

20. *Three Years in Europe* was the title of Brown's 1852 European travelogue. He revised and republished it in 1855 in Boston as *The American Fugitive in Europe. Sketches of Places and People Abroad*, the source of the text reprinted in chapter 3.

21. Monroe, Michigan, was a bustling port city on Lake Erie.

his razors were dull, and, above all, he never had been to New York to see the fashions. Neither had I. In a few weeks I had the entire business of the town, to the great discomfiture of the other barber. At this time, money matters in the Western States were in a sad condition. Any person who could raise a small amount of money was permitted to establish a bank, and allowed to issue notes for four times the sum raised. This being the case, many persons borrowed money merely long enough to exhibit to the bank inspectors, and the borrowed money was returned, and the bank left without a dollar in its vaults, if, indeed, it had a vault about its premises. The result was, that banks were started all over the Western States, and the country flooded with worthless paper. These were known as the 'Wild Cat Banks.'[22] Silver coin being very scarce, and the banks not being allowed to issue notes for a smaller amount than one dollar, several persons put out notes of from 6 to 75 cents in value; these were called 'Shinplasters.'[23] The Shinplaster was in the shape of a promissory note, made payable on demand. I have often seen persons with large rolls of these bills, the whole not amounting to more than five dollars. Some weeks after I had commenced business on my 'own hook,' I was one evening very much crowded with customers; and while they were talking over the events of the day, one of them said to me, 'Emperor, you seem to be doing a thriving business. You should do as other business men, issue your Shinplasters.' This of course, as it was intended, created a laugh; but with me it was no laughing matter, for from that moment I began to think seriously of becoming a banker. I accordingly went a few days after to a

22. In this exuberantly picaresque portion of his *Narrative*, Brown, now footloose, is discussing the largely unregulated banking system then operating in the United States. With no central banking system or national currency in place and few restrictions preventing individuals from setting up private banks, an entrepreneur could start up a bank and issue currency with minimal reserves. Brown's short-lived venture was one such wildcat bank, as quickly set up as taken down.

23. Shinplasters (the term was slang for promissory notes issued in denominations of less than one dollar) first circulated during the American Revolution. The colorful name denoted their nearly worthless value except for use in stopping up holes in socks and boots. Despite their instability as a substitute for metallic coins, they continued to circulate periodically until the Civil War.

printer, and he, wishing to get the job of printing, urged me to put out my notes, and showed me some specimens of engravings that he had just received from Detroit. My head being already filled with the idea of the bank, I needed but little persuasion to set the thing finally afloat. Before I left the printer the notes were partly in type, and I studying how I should keep the public from counterfeiting them. The next day, my Shinplasters were handed to me, the whole amount being twenty dollars; and, after being duly signed, were ready for circulation. The first night I had my money, my head was so turned and dizzy, that I could not sleep. In fact, I slept but little for weeks after the issuing of my bills. This fact satisfied me, that people of wealth pass many sleepless hours. At first my notes did not take well; they were too new, and viewed with a suspicious eye. But through the assistance of my customers, and a good deal of exertion on my part, my bills were soon in circulation; and nearly all the money received in return for my notes was spent in fitting up and decorating my shop. Few bankers get through this world without their difficulties, and I was not to be an exception. A short time after my money had been out, a party of young men, either wishing to pull down my vanity, or to try the soundness of my bank, determined to give it 'a run.' After collecting together a number of my bills, they came one at a time to demand other money for them; and I, not being aware of what was going on, was taken by surprise. One day as I was sitting at my table, stropping some new razors I had just purchased with the avails of my Shinplasters, one of the men entered and said, 'Emperor, you will oblige me if you will give me some other money for these notes of yours.' I immediately cashed the notes with the most worthless of the Wild Cat money that I had on hand, but which was a lawful tender. The young man had scarcely left, when a second appeared with a similar amount, and demanded payment. These were cashed, and soon a third came with his roll of notes. I paid these with an air of triumph, although I had but half a dollar left. I began now to think seriously what I should do, or how to act, provided another demand should be made. While I was thus engaged in thought, I saw the fourth man crossing the street, with a handful of notes, evidently my Shinplasters. I instantaneously shut the door, and looking out of the

window said, 'I have closed business for to-day: come to-morrow and I will see you.' In looking across the street, I saw my rival standing at his shopdoor, grinning and clapping his hands at my apparent downfall. I was completely 'done *Brown*' for the day.[24] However, I was not to be 'used up' in this way; so I escaped by the back door, and went in search of my friend, who had first suggested to me the idea of issuing my notes. I found him, told him of the difficulty I was in, and wished him to point out a way by which I might extricate myself. He laughed heartily at my sad position, and then said, 'You must act as all bankers do in this part of the country.' I inquired how they did; and he said, 'when your notes are brought to you, you must redeem them, and then send them out and get other money for them; and, with the latter, you can keep cashing your own Shinplasters.' This was, indeed, a new idea for me. I immediately commenced putting in circulation the notes which I had just redeemed, and my efforts were crowned with such success, that, together with the aid of my friend, who, like a philanthropist and Western Christian as he was, before I slept that night, my Shinplasters were again in circulation, and my bank once more on a sound basis."

In proportion as his mind expanded under the more favourable circumstances in which Brown was placed, he became anxious, not merely for the redemption of his race from personal slavery, but for the moral and religious elevation of those who were free. Finding that habits of intoxication were too prevalent among his coloured brethren, he, in conjunction with others, commenced a temperance reformation in their body. Such was the success of their efforts that, in three years, in the city of Buffalo alone, a society of upwards of 500 members was raised out of a coloured population of less than 700.[25] Of that society Mr. Brown was thrice elected president. The intellectual powers of our author, coupled with his intimate acquaintance with the workings of the slave system,

24. "Done brown" was slang for "done in," as well as a pun on his name and skin color.

25. Buffalo's African American community was substantial enough to host the National Negro Convention of 1843, a turning point in Brown's commitment to an antislavery career.

early recommended him to the Abolitionists, as a man eminently qualified to arouse the attention of the people of the Northern States to the great national sin of America. In 1843, he was engaged by the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society as a lecturing agent. From 1844 to 1847, he laboured in the Anti-Slavery cause in connection with the American Anti-Slavery Society; and from that period up to the time of his departure for Europe, in 1849, he was an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.[26] The records of these societies furnish abundant evidence of the success of his labours. From the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society he early received the following testimonial. "Since Mr. Brown became an agent of this society, he has lectured in very many of the towns of this commonwealth, and gained for himself, the respect and esteem of all whom he met. Himself a fugitive slave, he can experimentally describe the situation of those in bonds as bound with them; and he powerfully illustrates the diabolism of that system which keeps in chains and darkness a host of minds, which, if free and enlightened, would shine among men like stars in the firmament." Another member of that society speaks thus of him:—"I need not attempt any description of the ability and efficiency which characterised the speeches of William Wells Brown throughout the meeting. To you who know him so well, it is enough to say that his lectures were worthy of himself. He has left an impression on the minds of the people, that few could have done. Cold indeed must be the hearts that could resist the appeals of so noble a specimen of humanity, in behalf of a crushed and despised race."

In 1847, Mr. Brown wrote a narrative of his life and escape from slavery, which rapidly ran through several editions. A copy of this he

26. Organized antislavery agitation in North America began in the eighteenth century, but it evolved into a full-scale movement only in the 1830s. The earliest of the major antebellum organizations was the New York Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1831, which was soon followed by many other groups, such as the American Anti-Slavery Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1833; Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, founded in Boston in 1835; and Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, founded in Buffalo in 1842—all groups with which Brown had formal dealings.

forwarded to his old master, from whom he had escaped, and soon after a friend of Mr. Brown's received the following letter[27]:

"*St. Louis, Jan.* 10*th,* 1848.

"Sir,—I received a pamphlet, or a narrative, so called on the title-page, of the Life of William W. Brown, a fugitive slave, purporting to have been written by himself; and in his book I see a letter from you to the said William W. Brown. This said Brown is named William; he is a slave belonging to me, and ran away from me the first day of January, 1834.

"I purchased him of Mr. S. Willi, the last of September, 1833. I paid six hundred and fifty dollars for him. If I had wanted to speculate on him, I could have sold him for three times as much as I paid for him. I was offered two thousand dollars for him in New Orleans at one time, and fifteen hundred dollars for him at another time, in Louisville, Kentucky. But I would not sell him. I was told that he was going to run away, but I did not believe the man, for I had so much confidence in William. I want you to see him, and see if what I say is not the truth. I do not want him as a slave, but I think that his friends, who sustain him and give him the right hand of fellowship, or he himself, could afford to pay my agent in Boston three hundred and twenty five dollars, and I will give him free papers, so that he may go wherever he wishes to. Then he can visit St. Louis, or any other place he may wish.

"This amount is just half what I paid for him. Now, if this offer suits Mr. Brown, and the Anti-Slavery Society of Boston, or Massachusetts, let me know, and I will give you the name of my agent in Boston, and forward the papers, to be given to William W. Brown as soon as the money is paid.

"Yours respectfully,
"ENOCH PRICE."

27. The text to which he refers is of course *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave.* Sending an ex-master a slave narrative was a tactic frequently used by antislavery activists for public relations value.

"To Edmund Quincy, Esq."[28]

While Mr. Brown would most gladly have accepted manumission papers, relieving him from all future claim of the slaveholder, and thereby making his freedom more secure, he yet felt that he could not conscientiously purchase his liberty, because, by so doing, he would be putting money into the pockets of the manstealer which did not justly belong to him. He therefore refused the offer of Mr. Price.[29] Notwithstanding the celebrity he had acquired in the North, as a man of genius and talent, and the general respect his high character had gained him, the slave spirit of America denied him the rights of a citizen. By the constitution of the United States he was every moment liable to be arrested, and returned to the slavery from which he had fled. His only protection from such a fate was the anomaly of the ascendancy of the public opinion over the law of the country.

It has been for years thought desirable and advantageous to the cause of Negro emancipation in America, to have some talented man of colour always in Great Britain, who should be a living refutation of the doctrine of the inferiority of the African race; and it was moreover felt that none could so powerfully advocate the cause of "those in bonds" as one who had actually been "bound with them." Mr. Brown having received repeated invitations from distinguished English Abolitionists to visit Great Britain, and being chosen a delegate to the Paris Peace Congress of 1849 by the American Peace Society, and also by a convention of the coloured people

28. Edmund Quincy (1808–77) was descended from one of the most distinguished families in Massachusetts. He broke with his family's traditional politics by participating in the antislavery movement. Allied with William Lloyd Garrison, he supplied strong support to Brown during the months immediately following Brown's move to Boston in 1847. Quincy's comment comes in his supportive letter for the *Narrative*, which is reprinted in this chapter.

29. When he was composing this memoir, Brown was still, according to American law, the missing property of Captain Price. Although Brown stated here his moral objection to purchasing his liberty from Price, Brown did not interfere in 1854 when his English friend Ellen Richardson offered to take that obligation on herself. Acting through representatives, she negotiated and came to terms with Price, allowing Brown to return to the United States shortly thereafter a free man.

of Boston, he resolved to acquiesce in the wishes of his numerous friends, and accordingly sailed from the United States on the 18th of July, 1849.[30]

On leaving America he bore with him the following testimony from the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society:—

"In consequence of the departure for England of their esteemed friend and faithful co-labourer in the cause of the American slave, William W. Brown, the Board of Management of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society would commend him to the confidence, respect, esteem, and hospitality of the friends of emancipation wherever he may travel:—

"1. Because he is a fugitive slave from the American house of bondage, and on the soil which gave him birth can find no spot on which he can stand in safety from his pursuers, protected by law.

"2. Because he is a man, and not a chattel; and while as the latter, he may at any time be sold at public vendue under the American star-spangled banner, we rejoice to know that he will be recognised and protected as the former under the flag of England.

"3. Because, for several years past, he has nobly consecrated his time and talents, at great personal hazard, and under the most adverse circumstances, to the uncompromising advocacy of the cause of his enslaved countrymen.

"4. Because he visits England for the purpose of increasing, consolidating, and directing British humanity and piety against that horrible system of slavery in America, by which three millions of human beings, by creation the children of God, are ranked with four-footed beasts, and treated as marketable commodities.

"5. Because he has long been in their employment as a lecturing agent in Massachusetts, and has laboured with great acceptance and success;

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30. Ties between abolitionists in the United States and Great Britain were numerous and generally congenial during the midcentury period. Brown arrived in Great Britain with letters of introduction to British activists, several of whom became warm friends and supporters. The earliest international peace conference took place in London in 1843; the Paris conference in which Brown took part was the third. He was a member of a large, multiracial U.S. delegation, a rarity for any official American presence at that time. For Brown's participation in the Paris Peace Conference, see his account in chapter 3.

and from the acquaintance thus formed, they are enabled to certify that he has invariably conducted himself with great circumspection, and won for himself the sympathy, respect, and friendship of a very large circle of acquaintance."

The Coloured convention unanimously passed the following resolution:

"*Resolved*, — That we bid our brother, William Wells Brown, God speed in his mission to Europe, and commend him to the hospitality and encouragement of all true friends of humanity."

In a letter to an American journal,[31] announcing his arrival at Liverpool, he speaks as follows: —

"No person of my complexion can visit this country without being struck with the marked difference between the English and the Americans. The prejudice which I have experienced on all and every occasion in the United States, and to some degree on board the *Canada*, vanished as soon as I set foot on the soil of Britain. In America I had been bought and sold as a slave, in the Southern States. In the so-called Free States I had been treated as one born to occupy an inferior position; in steamers, compelled to take my fare on the deck; in hotels, to take my meals in the kitchen; in coaches, to ride on the outside; in railways, to ride in the 'Negro car'; and in churches, to sit in the 'Negro pew.'[32] But no sooner was I on British soil than I was recognised as a man and an equal. The very dogs in the streets appeared conscious of my manhood. Such is the difference, and such is the change that is brought about by a trip of nine days in an Atlantic steamer. * * *[33] For the first time in my life, I can say 'I am truly free.' My old

31. He is probably referring to the *Liberator*, the antislavery newspaper to which he frequently contributed letters about his foreign travels.

32. Brown was particularly sensitive to racial discrimination on public transportation. In chapter 19 of *Clotel* he sets up a battle of wits between a runaway slave and a railway conductor about the correct tariff (whether to be determined by commodity weight or by human unit) to be assessed the slave when he is consigned to the baggage car of a train equipped with no appropriate "Jim Crow" or "Negro Car."

33. These asterisks appear in the original, presumably because he was truncating his excerpt from his original printed text.

master may make his appearance here, with the constitution of the United States in his pocket, the fugitive slave law in one hand and the chains in the other, and claim me as his property; but all will avail him nothing. I can here stand and look the tyrant in the face, and tell him that I am his equal! England is, indeed, the 'land of the free, and the home of the brave.'"

The reception of Mr. Brown at the Peace Congress in Paris was most flattering. He admirably maintained his reputation as a public speaker. His brief address upon that "war spirit of America which holds in bondage nearly four millions of his brethren," produced a profound sensation. At its conclusion the speaker was warmly greeted by Victor Hugo, the Abbé Duguerry, Emile de Girardin, Richard Cobden, and every man of note in the assembly. At the soirée given by M. de Tocquerelle, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the other fetes given to the members of the Congress, Mr. Brown was received with marked attention.[34]

Having finished his Peace Mission in France, he returned to England, where he was received with a hearty welcome by some of the most influential abolitionists of this country. Most of the fugitive slaves, and in fact nearly all of the coloured men who have visited Great Britain from the

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34. Of the notables present at the congress, the chief was Victor Hugo (1802–85), one of France's greatest nineteenth-century creative writers and a political activist involved in various social causes. As president of the congress, Hugo delivered an address on international peace so memorable that it is still referred to today.

M. de Tocquerelle: Brown's mistaken spelling for the family name of the great French social historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59). Tocqueville had a special interest in the young democracy of the United States, a country he had toured in the 1830s. The result of his findings was his classic *Democracy in America* (published in French, 1835, with English-language editions available soon afterward in Great Britain and the United States).

Richard Cobden (1804–65) was a radical English social theorist and reformer, writer, and member of Parliament. At the time Brown met him, Cobden was one of the foremost figures in the international peace movement. Abbé Duguerry was the *curé* (that is, parish priest) of the important Madeleine district of Paris. Brown was greatly impressed by his speech at the congress and quoted him in *The American Fugitive in Europe* as saying that the "question of general pacification was built on truth — truth which emanated from God — and it were as vain to undertake to prevent air from expanding as to check the progress of truth. It must and would prevail." Ironically, Duguerry was executed during the uprising of the Paris Commune in May 1871.

United States, have come upon begging missions, either for some society or for themselves. Mr. Brown has been almost the only exception. With that independence of feeling, which those who are acquainted with him know to be one of his chief characteristics, he determined to maintain himself and family by his own exertions — by his literary labours, and the honourable profession of a public lecturer. From nearly all the cities and large provincial towns he received invitations to lecture or address public meetings. The mayors, or other citizens of note, presided over many of these meetings. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne a soirée was given him, and an address presented by the citizens.[35] A large and influential meeting was held at Bolton, Lancashire,[36] which was addressed by Mr. Brown, and at its close the ladies presented to him the following address: —

"An address, presented to Mr. William Wells Brown, the fugitive slave from America, by the ladies of Bolton, March 22nd, 1850: —

"Dear friend and brother, — We cannot permit you to depart from among us without giving expression to the feelings which we entertain towards yourself personally, and to the sympathy which you have awakened in our breasts for the three millions of our sisters and brothers who still suffer and groan in the prison-house of American bondage. You came among us an entire stranger; we received you for the sake of your mission; and having heard the story of your personal wrongs, and gazed with horror on the atrocities of slavery as seen through the medium of your touching descriptions, we are resolved, henceforward, in reliance on divine assistance, to render what aid we can to the cause which you have so eloquently pleaded in our presence.

"We have no words to express our detestation of the crimes which, in

35. Newcastle, in northwestern England, was one of numerous industrial cities whose antislavery societies Brown addressed. Brown had a special regard for the city, whose working class offered enthusiastic support for antislavery of a sort not typically matched by the working class in the United States. He wrote of the city in his European travelogue: "In no place in the United Kingdom has the American slave warmer friends than in Newcastle" (*The American Fugitive in Europe* [Boston: Jewett, 1855], 141).

36. Bolton, a large, industrial city in northwestern England, was a center of the country's large textile industry. Brown knew it primarily as a center of antislavery activism.

the name of liberty, are committed in the country which gave you birth. Language fails to tell our deep abhorrence of the impiety of those who, in the still more sacred name of religion, rob immortal beings not only of an earthly citizenship, but do much to prevent them from obtaining a heavenly one; and, as mothers and daughters, we embrace this opportunity of giving utterance to our utmost indignation at the cruelties perpetrated upon our sex, by a people professedly acknowledging the equality of all mankind. Carry with you, on your return to the land of your nativity, this our solemn protest against the wicked institution which, like a dark and baleful cloud, hangs over it; and ask the unfeeling enslavers, as best you can, to open the prison doors to them that are bound, and let the oppressed go free.

"Allow us to assure you that your brief sojourn in our town has been to ourselves, and to vast multitudes, of a character long to be remembered; and when you are far removed from us, and toiling, as we hope you may be long spared to do, in this righteous enterprise, it may be some solace to your mind to know that your name is cherished with affectionate regard, and that the blessing of the Most High is earnestly supplicated in behalf of yourself, your family, and the cause to which you have consecrated your distinguished talents."

A most respectable and enthusiastic public meeting was held at Sheffield, to welcome Mr. Brown, and the next day he was invited to inspect several of the large establishments there.[37] While going through the manufactory of Messrs. Broadhead and Atkin, silver and electroplaters, &c., in Love-street, and whilst he was being shown through the works, a subscription was hastily set on foot on his behalf, by the workmen and women of the establishment, which was presented to Mr. Brown in the counting-house by a deputation of the subscribers. The spokesman (the designer to Messrs. Broadhead and Atkin) addressing Mr. Brown on behalf of the workpeople, begged his acceptance of the present as a token of esteem,

37. The city of Sheffield, another industrial center in northern England, also gave Brown strong support when he spoke there publicly.

as well as an expression of their sympathy in the cause he advocates, viz. that of the American slave. Mr. Brown briefly thanked the parties for their spontaneous free will offering, accompanied as it was by a generous expression of sympathy for his afflicted brethren and sisters in bondage.

Mr. Brown has been in England nearly four years, and since his arrival he has travelled above twenty thousand miles through Great Britain, addressed one hundred and thirty public meetings, lectured in twenty-three mechanics and literary institutions, and given his services to many of the benevolent and religious societies on the occasion of their anniversary meetings. After a lecture, which he delivered before the Whittington Club, he received from the managers of that institution the following testimonial:

"*Whittington Club and Metropolitan Athenaeum*,
"189, *Strand*, *June* 21, 1850.

"My dear sir,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you the best thanks of the Managing Committee of this institution for the excellent lecture you gave here last evening, and also in presenting you in their names with an honorary membership of the club. It is hoped that you will often avail yourself of its privileges by coming amongst us. You will then see, by the cordial welcome of the members, that they protest against the odious distinctions made between man and man, and the abominable traffic of which you have been the victim.

"For my own part, I shall be happy to be serviceable to you in any way, and at all times be glad to place the advantages of the institution at your disposal.

"I am, my dear sir,
"Yours truly,
"WILLIAM STRUDWICKE,
"Secretary."
"Mr. W. Wells Brown."

On the 1st of August, 1851, a meeting of the most novel character was held at the Hall of Commerce, London, the chief actors being American fugitive slaves.[38] That meeting was most ably presided over by Mr. Brown, and the speeches made on the occasion by fugitive slaves were of the most interesting and creditable description. Although a residence in Canada is infinitely preferable to slavery in America, yet the climate of that country is uncongenial to the constitutions of the Negroes, and their lack of education is an almost insuperable barrier to their social progress. The latter evil Mr. Brown attempted to remedy by the establishment of Manual Labour Schools in Canada for fugitive slaves. A public meeting, attended by between 3,000 and 4,000 persons, was held on the 6th of January 1851, in the City Hall, Glasgow, which was presided over by Alexander Hastie, Esq., M.P., at which resolutions were unanimously passed, approving of Mr. Brown's scheme; which scheme, however, never received that amount of support which would have enabled him to bring it into practice; and the plan at present only remains as an evidence of its author's ingenuity and desire for the elevation of his oppressed and injured race. Mr. Brown subsequently made, through the columns of the *Times*, a proposition for the emigration of American fugitive slaves, under fair and honourable terms, from Canada to the West Indies, where there is a great lack of that labour which they are so capable of undertaking.[39] These efforts all show the willingness of this fugitive slave to aid those of his race. Last year Mr. Brown published his "Three Years in Europe; or, Places I have seen and People I have met." And his literary abilities may be

38. This meeting constituted one of Brown's proudest moments in England. Held in one of the largest meeting rooms in the city, with one thousand people (including Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson) in attendance, the gathering commemorated the eighteenth anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies. Brown presided over parts of the meeting, which he hoped would bring international pressure on the United States to abolish slavery.

39. Brown's letter urging emigration of the African American community of Canada to the West Indies was printed in the July 4, 1851, edition of the *Times* of London. Brown intermittently supported emigration to the Caribbean, especially to Haiti, but his views changed during the Civil War as he came to see improved prospects for blacks in the United States.

partly judged of from the following commendations of that ably written work: —

"The extraordinary excitement produced by 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' will, we hope, prepare the public of Great Britain and America for this lively book of travels by a real fugitive slave.[40] Though he never had a day's schooling in his life, he has produced a literary work not unworthy of a highly educated gentleman. Our readers will find in these letters much instruction, not a little entertainment, and the beatings of a manly heart, on behalf of a down-trodden race, with which they will not fail to sympathise." — *The Eclectic.*[41]

"When he writes on the wrongs of his race, or the events of his own career, he is always interesting or amusing." — *The Athenaeum.*

"The appearance of this book is too remarkable a literary event to pass without a notice. At the moment when attention in this country is directed to the state of the coloured people in America, the book appears with additional advantage; if nothing else were attained by its publication, it is well to have another proof of the capability of the Negro intellect. Altogether Mr. Brown has written a pleasing and amusing volume. Contrasted with the caricature and bombast of his white countryman Mr. Willis's description of 'People he has met,' a comparison suggested by the similarity of the title, it is both in intellect and in style a superior performance, and we are glad to bear this testimony to the literary merit of a work by a Negro author."[42] — *The Literary Gazette.*

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40. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) remained for more than a year the most controversial, best-selling book in both the United States and Great Britain.

41. Brown compiled the reviews excerpted here from an array of the leading critical newspapers and magazines of London.

42. Nathaniel Parker Willis (1806–67) was a prolific and popular American magazine writer, editor, and poet. He was derided, however, in some literary circles for his dandyism and pretense; in Brown's, for his proslavery views. The fugitive slave Harriet Jacobs lived as a nanny at various times in the 1840s and 1850s in several of Willis's New York–area households but was careful not to reveal her background to him. The reference is to Willis's book, *People I Have Met* (1850).

"That a man who was a slave for the first twenty years of his life, and who has never had a day's schooling, should produce such a book as this, cannot but astonish those who speak disparagingly of the African race." — *The Weekly News and Chronicle.*

"This remarkable book of a remarkable man cannot fail to add to the practical protests already entered in Britain against the absolute bondage of 3,000,000 of our fellow creatures. The impression of a self-educated son of slavery here set forth, must hasten the period when the senseless and impious denial of common claims to a common humanity, on the score of colour, shall be scouted with scorn in every civilised and Christian country. And when this shall be attained, among the means of destruction of the hideous abomination, his compatriots will remember with respect and gratitude the doings and sayings of William Wells Brown. The volume consists of a sufficient variety of scenes, persons, arguments, inferences, speculations, and opinions, to satisfy and amuse the most *exigeant* of those who read *pour se desennuyer*; while those who look deeper into things, and view with anxious hope the progress of nations and of mankind, will feel that the good cause of humanity and freedom, of Christianity, enlightenment, and brotherhood, cannot fail to be served by such a book as this." — *Morning Advertiser.*[43]

"He writes with ease and ability, and his intelligent observations upon the great question to which he has devoted, and is devoting his life, will be read with interest, and will command influence and respect." — *Daily News.*

Mr. Brown is most assiduous in his studies even at the present time. The following extract from his writings will show how he spends most of his leisure hours: —

"It was eight o'clock before I reached my lodgings. Although fatigued by the day's exertions, I again resumed the reading of Roscoe's 'Leo X.,'

43. *Exigeant* (Fr.) means *exacting*; to read *pour se désennuyer* (Fr.) means to read for diversion.

and had nearly finished seventy-three pages, when the clock on St. Martin's Church apprised me that it was two.[44] He who escapes from slavery at the age of twenty years without any education, as did the writer of this letter, must read when others are asleep, if he would catch up with the rest of the world. 'To be wise,' says Pope, 'is but to know how little can be known.'[45] The true searcher after truth and knowledge is always like a child; although gaining strength from year to year, he still 'learns to labour and to wait.'[46] The field of labour is ever expanding before him, reminding him that he has yet more to learn; teaching him that he is nothing more than a child in knowledge, and inviting him onward with a thousand varied charms. The son may take possession of the father's goods at his death, but he cannot inherit with the property the father's cultivated mind. He may put on the father's old coat, but that is all; the immortal mind of the first wearer has gone to the tomb. Property may be bequeathed but knowledge cannot. Then let him who would be useful in his generation be up and doing. Like the Chinese student who learned perseverance from the woman whom he saw trying to rub a crowbar into a needle, so should we take the experience of the past to lighten our feet through the paths of the future."

The following testimonial to Mr. Brown's abilities, from an American journal of which Frederick Douglas [*sic*] is editor, shows that his talents are highly appreciated in that country:—

"We have the pleasure to lay before our readers another interesting letter from W. Wells Brown. We rejoice to find our friend still persevering in the pursuit of knowledge, and still more do we rejoice to find such marked evidence of his rapid progress as his several letters afford. But a

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44. William Roscoe (1753–1831) was an English historian whose multivolume biography of Pope Leo X was reissued in London in 1846 in a less elaborate, revised edition. This was presumably the edition to which Brown had access.

45. From *An Essay on Man* (1734), a major philosophical poem by one of the greatest neoclassical poets of eighteenth-century England, Alexander Pope (1688–1744).

46. From "Resignation," by Longfellow.

few years ago he was a despised, degraded, whip-scarred slave, knowing nothing of letters; and now we find him writing accounts of his travels in a distant land, of which a man reared under the most favourable educational advantages might be proud."[47]

We should have said that it was Mr. Brown's intention to have returned to the United States to his family ere this. But the passage of the infamous "Fugitive Slave Law" prevented his returning.[48]

Mr. Brown's wife died in Buffalo N. Y. in Jan. 1851.[49] He has two daughters who are now in this country, being trained for teachers. Of course we need not add that for their education they are entirely dependent on their father's exertions. During last year, the Rev. Edward Hore, of Ramsgate, through a willingness to assist Mr. Brown in returning to the United States, wrote to his former owner, and offered him £50, if he would relinquish all claim to him, and furnish the fugitive with papers of emancipation, but the following note from the slaveowner speaks for itself: —

"*St. Louis, Feb.* 16*th*, 1852.

"Rev. sir, — I received your note, dated Jan. 6th, concerning a runaway slave of mine now known by the name of William Wells Brown. You state that I offered to take three hundred and twenty five dollars for him, and give him free papers, in 1848. I did so then, but since that time the laws

47. This excerpt appeared in the April 17, 1852, edition of *Frederick Douglass' Papers*. Douglass became the leading African American editor of his time after his return from England in 1847. Brown occasionally contributed to Douglass's periodical, as well as to other leading antislavery journals.

48. The Fugitive Slave Act, the most controversial of the acts comprising the Compromise of 1850, endangered the safety of fugitive slaves who, like Brown, were resident in the North by requiring all citizens to assist in the apprehension of fugitive slaves and, furthermore, denied those apprehended a trial by jury. Brown was only one of numerous fugitive African Americans who took shelter in Great Britain. The act was passed after Brown had left for England, but it was a major factor in his decision to remain there indefinitely.

49. Brown married Elizabeth Schooner (d. 1851), a free woman of color, in Cleveland in 1834. They lived together until separating acrimoniously in 1847, when Brown took custody of their two daughters and moved with them to Boston.

of the United States are materially changed. The Fugitive Slave Bill has passed since then. I can now take him anywhere in the United States, and I have everything arranged for his arrest if he lands at any port in the United States. But I will give him papers of emancipation, properly authenticated by our statutes, for the sum of five hundred dollars (or £100) that will make him as free as any white person. If this suits your views, you can let me know, and I will have the papers made out and forwarded to Boston, to Joseph Gruley, of the firm of Charles Wilkins and Co., 33, Long Wharf. The money must be paid before the papers are handed over to your agent.[50]

"Respectfully your obedient servant,
"ENOCH PRICE."
"To the Rev. Edward Hore.

50. The form and terms of this business transaction granting Brown manumission from Price were fairly standard. Such transactions typically were not carried out directly by master and ex-slave but, as here, through their representatives.

CHAPTER TWO

Writing Antislavery Oratory

Brown began his career as a lecturer in 1843 for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. Based in Buffalo, he lectured widely across the state and region, gradually earning a local and regional reputation. In 1847 he moved with his young daughters to Boston to accept work as an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, the powerful reform group led by William Lloyd Garrison since its founding in 1832.[1] Brown found the work rewarding, esteemed Garrison, and frequently published accounts of his work in the field in the society's weekly newspaper, the *Liberator*.[2] Brown would remain a mainstay of the movement until 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States.

His work was chiefly itinerant. He traveled across New England and beyond, sometimes for weeks at a time, to speak wherever local communities would turn out to hear his lectures. Drawn heavily from his personal experience, his talks were typically variations on the core story he told in *Narrative of William W. Brown*, if infused with a measure of topicality, local

1. William Lloyd Garrison (1805–79) was arguably the most influential figure in the antislavery movement. Trained as a printer and converted early to the cause of antislavery, he played a primary role in organizing and overseeing some of its chief institutions, including the American Anti-Slavery Society and the New England Anti-Slavery Society. He and Brown remained close allies from the time he hired Brown as a lecturer in 1847 until the end of the Civil War.

2. The *Liberator* (1831–65), a weekly newspaper founded and edited in Boston by Garrison, was the leading antislavery periodical in the United States. Its unvarying purpose was agitation for the abolition of slavery. Brown, a long-time contributor to and frequent subject of the paper, vociferously disagreed with Garrison's decision to suspend its publication after the Civil War ended, arguing that the fight for full civil rights and equality was not yet won.

references, and commentary. One place he spoke that first year was Salem, Massachusetts, birthplace of Nathaniel Hawthorne, no friend of antislavery and, to judge from the controversial introduction of *The Scarlet Letter* (1849), no lover of the city in its midcentury decline from its heyday as a maritime center. Hawthorne's antipathy toward the antislavery movement was not uncommon either in Salem or in cities across the North, but significant pockets of support existed in the city as well as across New England. Brown was well aware, in fact, that New England was the region most sympathetic to the message he came to Salem to preach.

Like most other New England cities of its size, Salem had a flourishing lyceum circuit that attracted a good-sized audience each winter to hear that season's list of traveling speakers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. But the city also hosted a more controversial series of lectures organized by its Female Anti-Slavery Society, the first such society in the country.[3] On the evening of November 14, 1847, Brown appeared before the women's organization as the fifth speaker in a series of six Sunday evening lectures, two of which were given by his well-known comrades, Garrison and Edmund Quincy.[4] By that point Brown's own reputation was on the rise, propelled by the publication in July of his immediately popular *Narrative of William W. Brown*. In addressing his audience that evening in Lyceum Hall, Brown clearly meant his lecture to deviate from the model of popularized culture, self-improvement, and uplifting rhetoric typical of lyceum talks. Just the same, his speech clearly drew heavily on the hortatory rhetorical style common to a wide va-

3. The role of women within the antislavery movement was a source of contention. Some male leaders, such as the brothers Arthur (1786–1865) and Lewis Tappan (1788–1873), and Gerrit Smith (1797–1884), objected to women's participation. Other male leaders, including Brown, Garrison, and Douglass, strongly supported not just women's participation in the movement but more broadly the cause of women's rights. Toward the end of the Salem lecture, Brown purposely calls on all people, including "every woman in the community," to join in the fight against slavery.

4. Edmund Quincy (1808–77) was descended from one of the most distinguished families in Massachusetts. He broke with his family's traditional politics by participating in the antislavery movement. Quincy, who was allied with Garrison, supplied strong support to Brown during the months immediately following Brown's move to Boston in 1847 and wrote a supportive letter championing the *Narrative* to readers (see chapter 1).

riety of reform addresses readily familiar to antebellum audiences, whether the subject was religion, temperance, diet, or — that evening — slavery. Its goal was likewise familiar: to mobilize the audience to fight for the reform of its society and preservation of local residents' common values.

Brown's initial confession of "considerable embarrassment" about his lack of education and ability was characteristic of orators who had been slaves. Even Frederick Douglass, nearly a dozen years into his career as an orator, hesitated as he began his stunning public jeremiad in his hometown of Rochester, New York, on the problematic meaning to his people of the Fourth of July: "The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable — and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to-day, is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude."[5] For experienced speakers like Brown and Douglass, that pose was both real and rhetorical. If the challenge of addressing and mobilizing large, primarily white, audiences was formidable, the act was also customary practice for both men.

Brown's task, as he repeatedly mentioned that evening, was the arduous one of *representing* "slavery as it is." This was a task, he lamented, that was nearly impossible: "We may all represent it as we think it is; and yet we shall all fail to represent the real condition of the Slave. . . . Slavery has never been represented; Slavery never can be represented." His rhetorical despair at the prospect of doing his subject verbal justice anticipated Walt Whitman's statement about the impossibility of articulating the enormous suffering endured during the Civil War: "The real war will never get in the books."[6] Brown's task was, if anything, far more fraught. His obstacles were multiple: slavery was remote from the minds, senses, and experiences of most of the Northern public; its truthful illustration risked violation of the general

5. "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 109.

6. Whitman made the remark in his old-age memoir *Specimen Days* (in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan [New York: Library of America, 1982], 778–79).

public's "fastidiousness"; and its portrayal ran up against ingrained views of black inferiority. Persuading his audience that slavery was not just a problem but its problem, and that unremedied slavery constituted a dire threat to the health of the national body politic, was a rhetorical challenge of the highest order.

Little wonder, then, that Brown and his peers felt severely tested in coming before the public. Brown's manner of responding to this challenge was well thought out and carefully implemented. To maximize both clarity and forcefulness, he adopted a fairly direct, simple vocabulary and fitted it to an emotional, sentimental tone widely in use during the romantic period (though for the most part absent in his *Narrative*). Furthermore, he applied that language to the social institution his Victorian audience was most predisposed to honor and defend: the nuclear family. The images he drew of defenseless women preyed upon by their masters, their husbands and brothers powerless to intervene, were particularly well calculated to affect members of a female antislavery society. Perhaps the most striking verbal note in his talk was his recurrent use of the phrase "the three millions" as a short-handed referent to the multitude of African Americans held in bondage. Although the figure was widely used in abolitionist circles, Brown's humanized usage must surely have been effective; Henry Highland Garnet had used the phrase as a kind of talismanic invocation in his already celebrated 1843 "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," which Brown had heard.

In formulating his address Brown adhered consistently to an ideology of nurture over nature that implicitly challenged the underlying basis of racism. People, he argued, whether as individuals or groups, were the product of their circumstances and experience, not their race or blood. He was careful to apply this line of analysis to Northern whites as well as to Southern blacks. Both groups, he emphasized, suffered from the "influence" of slavery, which degraded the morals of all who came into contact with it. The dual track of his argument was designed to link the members of his audience as tightly as possible to the otherwise remote and invisible presence of slaves one thousand miles away. That message was connected to a larger one of dual

American exceptionalism: a society of simultaneously unique potential and unique deviation from its professed ideals.

The text of Brown's talk was transcribed by phonographic (phonetic) shorthand by a young Boston reporter whose motivation went unmentioned but presumably owed to sympathy for the antislavery cause. That text was then published the following month as a twenty-four-page pamphlet by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and sold through movement outlets and the mails at five cents for a single copy, fifty cents for a dozen, and $3.50 for a hundred.[7]

7. Publication of controversial literature in pamphlet form was common in antebellum America. Each year thousands of pamphlets arguing for or against a host of religious, cultural, political, and economic causes flew off the presses of U.S. reform groups, religious societies, newspaper offices, government printing offices, and commercial publishers. Terms of sale for Brown's pamphlet were advertised in the *Liberator* well into the following year.

A Lecture delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem

Mr. Chairman, and Ladies and Gentlemen:—

In coming before you this evening to speak upon this all-important, this great and commanding subject of freedom, I do not appear without considerable embarrassment; nor am I embarrassed without a cause. I find myself standing before an audience whose opportunities for education may well be said to be without limit. I can scarcely walk through a street in your city, or through a city or a town in New England, but I see your common schools, your high schools, and your colleges.[1] And when I recollect that but a few years since, I was upon a Southern plantation, that I was a Slave, a chattel, a thing, a piece of property,—when I recollect that at the age of twenty-one years I was entirely without education, this, every one will agree, is enough to embarrass me. But I do not come here for the purpose of making a grammatical speech, nor for the purpose of making a speech that shall receive the applause of my hearers. I did not accept the invitation to lecture before this association, with the expectation or the hope that I should be able to present anything new. I accepted the invitation because I felt that I owed a duty to the cause of humanity; I felt that I owed a duty to three millions of my brethren and sisters, with some of whom I am identified by the dearest ties of nature, and with most of whom I am identified by the scars which I carry upon

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The text comes from the original pamphlet: *A Lecture delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847).

1. By the 1840s New England had the broadest array of common schools (as public schools were known in the nineteenth century) and colleges of any region in the country. The benefits of public schooling, however, were not spread equally. Most schools were racially segregated at the time that Brown wrote, although he was able in the early 1850s to find integrated schools in Massachusetts to which to send his daughters.

my back. This, and this alone, induced me to accept the invitation to lecture here.

My subject for this evening is Slavery as it is, and its influence upon the morals and character of the American people.

I may try to represent to you Slavery as it is; another may follow me and try to represent the condition of the Slave; we may all represent it as we think it is; and yet we shall all fail to represent the real condition of the Slave. Your fastidiousness would not allow me to do it; and if it would, I, for one, should not be willing to do it; — at least to an audience. Were I about to tell you the evils of Slavery, to represent to you the Slave in his lowest degradation, I should wish to take you, one at a time, and whisper it to you.

Slavery has never been represented; Slavery never can be represented. What is a Slave? A Slave is one that is in the power of an owner. He is a chattel; he is a thing; he is a piece of property. A master can dispose of him, can dispose of his labor, can dispose of his wife, can dispose of his offspring, can dispose of everything that belongs to the Slave, and the Slave shall have no right to speak; he shall have nothing to say. The Slave cannot speak for himself; he cannot speak for his wife, or his children. He is a thing. He is a piece of property in the hands of a master, as much as is the horse that belongs to the individual that may ride him through your streets to-morrow.[2] Where we find one man holding an unlimited power over another, I ask, what can we expect to find his condition? Give one man power *ad infinitum* over another, and he will abuse that power;

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2. Comparison of humans and animals was a commonplace in the language of chattel-based American slavery. The metaphor Brown uses here, for instance, repeats a similar comparison of people and horses made by Frederick Douglass: "By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, ed. David W. Blight [Boston: Bedford, 1993], 39). Mark Twain expressed this common presumption even more bluntly in characterizing a slave owner in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: "He was a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals" (p. 66 in Penguin's 1969 London edition edited by Malcolm Bradbury).

no matter if there be law; no matter if there be public sentiment in favor of the oppressed.

The system of Slavery, that I, in part, represent here this evening, is a system that strikes at the foundation of society, that strikes at the foundation of civil and political institutions. It is a system that takes man down from that lofty position which his God designed that he should occupy; that drags him down, places him upon a level with the beasts of the field, and there keeps him, that it may rob him of his liberty. Slavery is a system that tears the husband from the wife, and the wife from the husband; that tears the child from the mother, and the sister from the brother; that tears asunder the tenderest ties of nature. Slavery is a system that has its blood-hounds, its chains, its negro-whips, its dungeons, and almost every instrument of cruelty that the human eye can look at; and all this for the purpose of keeping the Slave in subjection; all this for the purpose of obliterating the mind, of crushing the intellect, and of annihilating the soul.

I have read somewhere of an individual named Caspar Hauser, who made his appearance in Germany some time since, and represented that he had made his escape from certain persons who had been trying to obliterate his mind, and to annihilate his intellect.[3] The representation of that single individual raised such an excitement in Germany, that law-makers took it in hand, examined it, and made a law covering that particular case and all cases that should occur of that kind; and they denominated it the "murder of the soul." Now, I ask, what is Slavery doing in one half of the States of this Union, at the present time? The souls of three millions of American citizens are being murdered every day, un-

3. Caspar (or Kaspar) Hauser (1812–33) was the subject of endless sensational stories in Europe. Of uncertain parentage and nationality, he was sixteen when he came to public attention after he was found senselessly wandering the streets of Nuremberg, Germany. The public was fascinated by his tale of a lifetime of involuntary indoor confinement, which had left him illiterate and unsocialized. Hauser has been the source of endless medical, scientific, and mystical speculation and literary and artistic inspiration ever since.

der the blighting influence of American Slavery.[4] Twenty thousand have made their escape from the prison-house; some have taken refuge in the Canadas, and others are lurking behind the stumps in the Slave-States. They are telling their tales, and representing that Slavery is not only trying to murder their souls, but the souls of three million of their countrymen at the present day; and the excitement that one individual raised in monarchical Germany, three millions have failed to raise in democratic, Christian, republican America!

I ask, is not this a system that we should examine? Ought we not to look at it? Ought we not to see what the cause is that keeps the people asleep upon the great subject of American Slavery? When I get to talking about Slavery as it is,—when I think of the three millions that are in chains at the present time, I am carried back to the days when I was a Slave upon a Southern plantation; I am carried back to the time when I saw dear relatives, with whom I am identified by the tenderest ties of nature, abused and ill-treated. I am carried back to the time when I saw hundreds of Slaves driven from the Slave-growing to the Slave-consuming States. When I begin to talk of Slavery, the sighs and the groans of three millions of my countrymen come to me upon the wings of every wind; and it causes me to feel sad, even when I think I am making a successful effort in representing the condition of the Slave.

What is the protection from the masters which Slaves receive? Some say, law; others, public sentiment. But, I ask, Where is the law; where is the public sentiment? If it is there, it is not effectual; it will not protect

4. Brown was actually using the legal term *citizen* rhetorically. At the time he was speaking, slaves throughout the South were denied the rights and status of citizens. After the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision, so even were free African Americans. Chief Justice Roger Taney asserted sweepingly in his majority decision that blacks "are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution." As a result, he opined, they "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it."

the Slave. Has the case ever occurred where the Slaveholder has been sent to the State's Prison, or anything of the kind, for ill-treating, or for murdering a slave? No such case is upon record; and it is because the Slave receives no protection and can expect no protection from the hands of the master. What has the brother not done, upon the Slave-plantation, for the purpose of protecting the chastity of a dearly beloved sister? What has the father not done to protect the chastity of his daughter? What has the husband not done to protect his wife from the hands of the tyrant? They have committed murders. The mother has taken the life of her child, to preserve that child from the hands of the Slave-trader.[5] The brother has taken the life of his sister, to protect her chastity. As the noble Virginius seized the dagger, and thrust it to the heart of the gentle Virginia, to save her from the hands of Appius Claudius of Rome, so has the father seized the deadly knife, and taken the life of his daughter, to save her from the hands of the master or of the Negro-driver.[6] And yet we are told that the Slave is protected; that there is law and public sentiment! It is all a dead letter to the Slave.

But why stand here and try to represent the condition of the Slave? My whole subject must necessarily represent his condition, and I will therefore pass to the second part,—the influence of Slavery upon the morals of the people; not only upon the morals of the Slave-holding South, or of the Slave, but upon the morals of the people of the United States of America. I am not willing to draw a line between the people of the North and the people of the South. So far as the people of the North

5. The claim is not simply rhetorical. Reports about peremptory acts of infanticide circulated widely through the antebellum press. The best-known instance today is the 1856 tragedy of the escaped slave Margaret Garner of Kentucky, who slit her daughter's throat, seeing it as a lesser evil than allowing her return to slavery. That historical event is incorporated into the plot of Toni Morrison's masterful novel *Beloved* (1987).

6. In Roman history and folklore the centurion Virginius stabbed to death his daughter Virginia to prevent her violation by the ruler Appius Claudius. The tale has remained widely popular through the centuries, but Brown had specific reasons to find it meaningful and referred to it in multiple writings.

are connected with Slaveholding, they necessarily become contaminated by the evils that follow in the train of Slavery.[7]

Let me look at the influence which Slavery has over the morals of the people of the South. Three millions of Slaves unprotected! A million of females that have no right to marriage! Among the three millions of Slaves upon the Southern plantations, not a single lawful marriage can be found! They are out of the pale of the law. They are herded together, so far as the law is concerned, as so many beasts of burden are in the free States.

Talk about the influence of Slavery upon the morals of the people, when the Slave is sold in the Slave-holding States for the benefit of the church? when he is sold for the purpose of building churches? when he is sold for the benefit of the minister?

I have before me a few advertisements, taken from public journals and papers, published in the Slaveholding States of this Union.[8] I have one or two that I will read to the audience, for I am satisfied that no evidence is so effectual for the purpose of convincing the people of the North of the great evils of Slavery as is the evidence of Slaveholders themselves. I do not present to you the assertion of the North; I do not bring before you the advertisement of the Abolitionists, or my own assertion; but I bring before you the testimony of the Slaveholders themselves, — and by their own testimony must they stand or fall.[9]

The first is an advertisement from the columns of the New Orleans Picayune, one of the most reputable papers published in the State of

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7. The prescience of Brown's claim that the reach of slavery extended past the Mason-Dixon Line became clear with the passage in 1850 of the Fugitive Slave Act, which obligated all Americans to cooperate in the apprehension of fugitive slaves and their return to their lawful masters. That legislation agitated many people who had previously been able to assume a benign neglect toward slavery.

8. In the string of paragraphs that follows, Brown uses quotes and excerpts from a variety of Southern newspapers. He presumably got access to them in a Boston newspaper office such as the *Liberator*, which received them through the editorial exchange system.

9. The practice in which Brown engages here, of using the printed materials of the South as self-incriminating documents in the court of Northern (or international) public opinion, was a common one in the antislavery movement.

Louisiana, and I may say one of the most reputable papers published South of Mason and Dixon's line. If you take up the Boston Courier, or any other reputable paper, you will probably find in it an extract from the New Orleans Picayune, whose editor is at the present time in Mexico, where our people are cutting the throats of their neighbors.[10]

> "Cock-Pit.—*Benefit of Fire Company No. 1, Lafayette.*—A cock-fight will take place on Sunday, the 17th inst., at the well-known house of the subscriber. As the entire proceeds are for the benefit of the Fire Company, a full attendance is respectfully solicited. Adam Israng,
>
> *Corner of Josephine and Tchoupitolas Streets, Lafayette.*"
>
> [N. O. Pic. of Sunday, Dec. 17.]

> "Turkey Shooting.—This day, Dec. 17, from 10 o'clock, A. M., until 6 o'clock, P. M., and the following Sundays, at M'Donoughville, opposite the Second Municipality Ferry."
>
> [From the same paper]

The next is an advertisement from the New Orleans Bee, an equally popular paper.

> "A Bull Fight, between a ferocious bull and a number of dogs, will take place on Sunday next, at 4¼ o'clock, P. M., on the other side of the river, at Algiers, opposite Canal Street. After the bull fight, a fight will take place between a bear and some dogs. The whole to conclude by a combat between an ass and several dogs.[11]

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10. As Brown states, the *Boston Courier* and *New Orleans Picayune* were daily newspapers known and respected not just locally but nationally.

The sarcastic reference to Mexico reflects Brown's opposition to the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. Like many of his colleagues in the antislavery movement, Brown opposed the war chiefly because he saw its successful outcome as likely to result in the expansion of slavery into the captured territories. Abolitionists anticipated that, worse yet, once the territories were formally admitted into the Union as states, their representation in Congress would upset the current political balance between free and slaveholding states.

11. Brown portrayed a similar scene of animal fighting in the South in *Clotel*; see chapter 4.

> Amateurs bringing dogs to participate in the fight will be admitted gratis. Admittance — Boxes, 50 cts.; Pit, 30 cts. The spectacle will be repeated every Sunday, weather permitting.
>
> Pepe Llulla."

Now these are not strange advertisements to be found in a Southern journal. They only show what Slavery has been doing there to contaminate the morals of the people. Such advertisements can be found in numbers of the public journals that are published in the Slaveholding States of this Union. You would not find such an advertisement in a Boston or a Salem paper. Scarcely a paper in New England would admit such an advertisement; and why? Because you are not so closely connected with Slavery; you are not so much under its blighting influence as are the Slave-owners in the Slaveholding States of the Union.

I have another advertisement, taken from a Charleston paper, advertising the property of a deceased Doctor of Divinity, probably one of the most popular men of his denomination that ever resided in the United States of America. In that advertisement it says, that among the property are "twenty-seven Negroes, two mules, one horse, and an old wagon." That is the property of a Slave-holding Doctor of Divinity![12]

I have another advertisement before me, taken from an Alabama paper, in which eight Slaves are advertised to be sold for the benefit of an Old School Theological Seminary for the purpose of making ministers. I have another, where ten Slaves are advertised to be sold for the benefit of Christ Church Parish. I have another, where four Slaves are advertised to be sold for the benefit of the Missionary cause, — a very benevolent cause indeed. I might go on and present to you advertisement after advertisement representing the system of American Slavery, and its contaminating influence upon the morals of the people. I have an account, very recent,

12. Brown's footnote identifies this person as "Dr. Furman, of South Carolina." Richard Furman (1755–1825), a prominent Baptist leader in the pre–Civil War South, was the minister of the First Baptist Church of Charleston and the man for whom Furman University in Greenville was named the year after his death.

that a Slave-trader, — one of the meanest and most degrading positions in which a man can be found upon God's footstool, — buying and selling the bodies and souls of his fellow-countrymen, has joined the church, and was, probably, hopefully converted. It is only an evidence that when Wickedness, with a purse of gold, knocks at the door of the Church, she seldom, if ever, is refused admission.

This is not the case here; for, some forty years since, the Church was found repudiating Slavery; she was found condemning Slavery as man-stealing, and a sin of the deepest dye. The Methodists, Presbyterians, and other denominations, and some of the first men in the country, bore their testimony against it. But Slavery has gone into all the ramifications of society; it has taken root in almost every part of society, and now Slavery is popular. Slavery has become popular, because it has power.

Speak of the blighting influence of Slavery upon the morals of the people? Go into the Slaveholding States, and there you can see the master going into the church, on the Sabbath, with his Slave following him into the church, and waiting upon him, — both belonging to the same church. And the day following, the master puts his Slave upon the auction-stand, and sells him to the highest bidder. The Church does not condemn him; the law does not condemn him; public sentiment does not condemn him; but the Slaveholder walks through the community as much respected after he has sold a brother belonging to the same church with himself, as if he had not committed an offence against God.

Go into the Slaveholding States, and to-morrow you may see families of Slaves driven to the auction-stand, to be sold to the highest bidder; the husband to be sold in presence of the wife, the wife in presence of the husband, and the children in presence of them both. All this is done under the sanction of law and order; all is done under the sanction of public sentiment, whether that public sentiment be found in Church or in State.

Leaving the Slaveholding States, let me ask what is the influence that Slavery has over the minds of the Northern people? What is its contaminating influence over the great mass of the people of the North? It must have an influence, either good or bad. People of the North, being con-

nected with the Slaveholding States, must necessarily become contaminated. Look all around, and you see benevolent associations formed for the purpose of carrying out the principles of Christianity; but what have they been doing for Humanity? What have they ever done for the Slave?

First, we see the great American Bible Society.[13] It is sending bibles all over the world for the purpose of converting the heathen. Its agents are to be found in almost every country and climate. Yet three millions of Slaves have never received a single bible from the American Bible Society. A few years since, the American Anti-Slavery Society offered to the American Bible Society a donation of $5,000 if they would send bibles to the Slaves, or make an effort to do it, and the American Bible Society refused even to *attempt* to send the bible to the Slaves!

A Bible Society, auxiliary to the American Bible Society, held a meeting a short time since, at Cincinnati, in the State of Ohio. One of its members brought forward a resolution that the Society should do its best to put the bible into the hands of every poor person in the country. As soon as that was disposed of, another member brought forward a resolution that the Society should do its best to put the bible into the hands of every Slave in the country. That subject was discussed for two days, and at the end of that time they threw the resolution under the table, virtually resolving that they would not make an attempt to send bibles to the Slaves.

Leaving the American Bible Society, the next is the American Tract Society.[14] What have you to say against the American Tract Society? you may ask. I have nothing to say against any association that is formed

13. Operating out of its home base in New York City, the American Bible Society (founded 1815) was the largest disseminator of Bibles to nineteenth-century Americans, as well as to missionaries for distribution around the world. Philanthropic organizations such as the American Bible Society (and the American Tract Society, which I discuss in the next note) aroused ambivalent emotions in Brown. Although he took heart in their activities as mass distributors of what he regarded as good texts, he understood that their texts might as readily be used to justify as denounce slavery.

14. Also based in New York City, the American Tract Society (founded 1825) was one of the largest publishers of religious literature in the United States in Brown's time (as in our own). It was also one of the largest distributors, employing an itinerant sales force of hundreds to deliver its publications to readers around the country.

for a benevolent purpose, if it will only carry out the purpose for which it was formed. Has the American Tract Society ever published a single line against the sin of Slaveholding? You have all, probably, read tracts treating against licentiousness, against intemperance, against gambling, against Sabbath-breaking, against dancing, against almost every sin that you can think of; but not a single syllable has ever been published by the American Tract Society against the sin of Slaveholding. Only a short time since they offered a reward of $500 for the best treatise against the sin of dancing. A gentleman wrote the treatise, they awarded him the $500, and the tract is now in the course of publication, if it is not already published. Go into a nice room, with fine music, and good company, and they will publish a tract against your dancing; while three millions are dancing every day at the end of the master's cowhide, and they cannot notice it! Oh, no; it is too small fry for them! They cannot touch that, but they can spend their money in publishing tracts against your dancing here at the North, while the Slave at the South may dance until he dances into his grave, and they care nothing about him.

A friend of mine, residing at Amsterdam, N. Y., who has been accustomed every year to make a donation to the American Tract and Bible Societies, some two years since said to the Agent when he was called upon, "I will not give you anything now, but tell the Board at New York that if they will publish a tract against the sin of Slaveholding, they may draw on me for $50." The gentleman's name is Ellis Clisby, a member of the Presbyterian church, and a more reputable individual than he cannot be found. The next year when the Agent called upon him, he asked where was the tract. Said the agent, "I laid it before the Committee and they said they dared not publish it. If they published it their Southern contributions would be cut off."[15] So they were willing to sacrifice the right, the interest, and the welfare of the Slave for the "almighty dollar."

15. The dilemma Brown chronicles here was one faced by an increasing number of businesses, churches, and charitable organizations as the growing rift between North and South about slavery forced difficult decisions. More often than not, the approach taken was the cautious one of not offending the South.

They were ready to sacrifice humanity for the sake of receiving funds from the South. Has not Slavery an influence over the morals of the North?

I have before me an advertisement where some Slaves are advertised to be sold at the South for the benefit of merchants in the city of New York, and I will read it to you. It is taken from the Alabama Beacon.

> "Public Sale of Negroes. — By virtue of a deed of trust made to me by Charles Whelan, for the benefit of J. W. and R. Leavitt, and of Lewis B. Brown, all of the city of New York, which deed is on record in Greene County, I shall sell at public auction, for cash, on Main Street, in the town of Greensborough, on Saturday, the 22d day of December next, a Negro Woman, about 30 years old, and her child, eleven months old; a Negro Girl about 10 years old, and a Negro girl about 8 years old.
>
> Wm. Trapp, *Trustee*."

Now if I know anything about the history of this country, the 22d day of December is the anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims; the anniversary of the day when those ambassadors, those leaders in religion, came to the American shore; when they landed within the encircling arms of Cape Cod and Cape Ann, fleeing from political and religious tyranny, seeking political and religious freedom in the New World. The anniversary of that day is selected for selling an American mother and her four children for the benefit of New York merchants.

I happen to know something of one of the parties. He is a member of Dr. Spring's church, and it is said that he gives more money to support that church than any other individual.[16] And I should not wonder, when the bones, and muscles, and sinews, and hearts of human beings are put upon the auction-stand and sold for his benefit, if he could give a little to the church. I should not wonder if he could give a little to some institution that might throw a cloak over him, whitewash him, and make him

16. Gardiner Spring (1785–1873) was a founder of the American Bible Society and was well known throughout New York City as the (conservative) pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church.

appear reputable in the community. Has not Slavery an influence over the morals of the North, and of the whole community?

Now let us leave the morals of the American people and look at their character. When I speak of the character of the American people, I look at the nation. I place all together, and draw no mark between the people and the government. The government is the people, and the people are the government. You who are here, all who are to be found in New England, and throughout the United States of America, are the persons that make up the great American confederacy; and I ask, what is the influence that Slavery has had upon the character of the American people? But for the blighting influence of Slavery, the United States of America would have a character, would have a reputation, that would outshine the reputation of any other government that is to be found upon God's green earth.

Look at the struggle of the fathers of this country for liberty. What did they struggle for? What did they go upon the battle-field for, in 1776? They went there, it is said, for the purpose of obtaining liberty; for the purpose of instituting a democratic, republican government. What is Democracy? Solon, upon one occasion, while speaking to the Athenians said, "A democratic government is a government where an injury done to the least of its citizens is regarded as an insult and an injury to the whole commonwealth."[17] That was the opinion of an old law-maker and statesman upon the subject of Democracy. But what says an American statesman? A South Carolina governor says that Slavery is the corner-stone of our Republic.[18] Another eminent American statesman says that two hundred years have sanctioned and sanctified American Slavery, and that is property which the law declares to be property. Which shall we believe? One that is reared in republican America, or one that is brought

17. Solon (638 BCE–558 BCE) was an Athenian constitution writer and ruler renowned for his prowess as a legislator and his solicitude toward the people.

18. The South Carolina elite so typically linked the economic and social future of the region to the preservation of slavery that it would have been the exceptional South Carolina governor who saw slavery negatively.

up in the lap of aristocracy? Every one must admit that democracy is nothing more or less than genuine freedom and liberty, protecting every individual in the community.

I might carry the audience back to the time when your fathers were struggling for liberty in 1776. When they went forth upon the battle-field and laid down their bones, and moistened the soil with their blood, that their children might enjoy liberty. What was it for? Because a three-penny tax upon tea, a tax upon paper, or something else had been imposed upon them. We are not talking against such taxes upon the Slave. The Slave has no tea; he has no paper; he has not even himself; he has nothing at all.

When we examine the influence of Slavery upon the character of the American people, we are led to believe that if the American Government ever had a character, she has lost it. I know that upon the 4th of July, our 4th of July orators talk of Liberty, Democracy, and Republicanism. They talk of liberty, while three millions of their own countrymen are groaning in abject Slavery. This is called the "land of the free, and the home of the brave"; it is called the "Asylum of the oppressed"; and some have been foolish enough to call it the "Cradle of Liberty."[19] If it is the "cradle of liberty," they have rocked the child to death. It is dead long since, and yet we talk about democracy and republicanism, while one-sixth of our countrymen are clanking their chains upon the very soil which our fathers moistened with their blood. They have such scenes even upon the holy Sabbath, and the American people are perfectly dead upon the subject. The cries, and shrieks, and groans of the Slave do not wake them.

It is deplorable to look at the character of the American people, the character that has been given to them by the institution of Slavery. The

19. In the second instance he is quoting loosely from George Washington's General Orders of April 18, 1783. The full quote is this: "Happy, thrice happy shall they be pronounced hereafter, who have contributed any thing, who have performed the meanest office in erecting this stupendous fabrick of Freedom and Empire on the broad basis of Independency; who have assisted in protecting the rights of humane nature and establishing an Asylum for the poor and oppressed of all nations and religions."

profession of the American people is far above the profession of the people of any other country. Here the people profess to carry out the principles of Christianity. The American people are a sympathising people. They not only profess, but appear to be a sympathising people to the inhabitants of the whole world. They sympathise with everything else but the American Slave. When the Greeks were struggling for liberty, meetings were held to express sympathy. Now they are sympathising with the poor down-trodden serfs of Ireland, and are sending their sympathy across the ocean to them.[20]

But what will the people of the Old World think? Will they not look upon the American people as hypocrites? Do they not look upon your professed sympathy as nothing more than hypocrisy? You may hold your meetings and send your words across the ocean; you may ask Nicholas of Russia to take the chains from his poor down-trodden serfs, but they look upon it all as nothing but hypocrisy.[21] Look at our twenty thousand fugitive Slaves, running from under the stars and stripes, and taking refuge in the Canadas; *twenty thousand*, some leaving their wives, some their husbands, some leaving their children, some their brothers, and some their sisters, — fleeing to take refuge in the Canadas.[22] Wherever the stars and stripes are seen flying in the United States of America, they point him out as a Slave.

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20. Black and white abolitionists commonly accused their compatriots of selective sympathy, as in identifying with the suffering of the downtrodden in countries like Greece and Ireland but ignoring the plight of American slaves.

Greece fought for independence from the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s, receiving it finally in 1832 in a cause popular in the Christian West. Ireland was in the midst of widespread famine at the time of Brown's speech; hundreds of thousands of people died during the decade, and hundreds of thousands more emigrated, chiefly to the United States.

21. Serfdom in Russia was ended not by Nicholas I (1796–1855) but by his son and successor, Alexander II (1818–81), in 1861. Slavery was outlawed in most of the United States in 1863 by President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and constitutionally abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment (ratified in 1865). The names of Alexander II and Abraham Lincoln were frequently paired as emancipators during the nineteenth century.

22. See chapter 1 on Brown's role in facilitating the flight of American fugitive slaves to Canada.

If I wish to stand up and say, "I am a man," I must leave the land that gave me birth. If I wish to ask protection as a man, I must leave the American stars and stripes. Wherever the stars and stripes are seen flying upon American soil, I can receive no protection; I am a Slave, a chattel, a thing. I see your liberty-poles around in your cities.[23] If to-morrow morning you are hoisting the stars and stripes upon one of your liberty-poles, and I should see the man following me who claims my body and soul as his property, I might climb to the very top of your liberty-pole, I might cut the cord that held your stars and stripes and bind myself with it as closely as I could to your liberty-pole, I might talk of law and the Constitution, but nothing could save me unless there be public sentiment enough in Salem. I could not appeal to law or the Constitution; I could only appeal to public sentiment; and if public sentiment would not protect me, I must be carried back to the plantations of the South, there to be lacerated, there to drag the chains that I left upon the Southern soil a few years since.[24]

This is deplorable; and yet the American Slave *can* find a spot where he may be a man;—but it is not under the American flag. Fellow citizens, I am the last to eulogise any country where they oppress the poor. I have nothing to say in behalf of England or any other country, any further than as they extend protection to mankind. I say that I honor England for protecting the black man.[25] I honor every country that shall receive

23. Liberty poles were symbols of dissent that spread from Massachusetts to the other colonies during the years leading up to the American Revolution. In the years since they have served as popular markers of American patriotism. Generally made from tree trunks and ornamented in various patriotic fashions, liberty poles were erected in many American communities in the period leading up to, during, and following the War of Independence. One of the most famous is the one that the bewildered Rip Van Winkle (in Washington Irving's classic story of that name) sees on returning to his native village after his twenty-year sleep and on whose top he mistakes a flag of stars and stripes for "a red night cap."

24. Brown's heightened rhetoric about his vulnerable status was disquietingly factual. Endangered as a fugitive slave with a public career, he would have had no protection in the Constitution or courts against his ex-master's lawful right to reclaim him as "stolen" property.

25. Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833.

the American Slave, that shall protect him, and that shall recognise him as a man.

I know that the United States will not do it; but I ask you to look at the efforts of other countries. Even the Bey of Tunis, a few years since, has decreed that there shall not be a Slave in his dominions; and we see that the subject of liberty is being discussed throughout the world.[26] People are looking at it; they are examining it; and it seems as though every country, and every people, and every government were doing something, excepting the United States. But Christian, democratic, republican America is doing nothing at all. It seems as though she would be the last. It seems as though she was determined to be the last to knock the chain from the limbs of the Slave. Shall the American people be behind the people of the Old World? Shall they be behind those who are represented as almost living in the dark ages?

> "Shall every flap of England's flag
> Proclaim that all around are free,
> From farthest Ind to each blue crag
> That beetles o'er the western sea?
> And shall we scoff at Europe's kings,
> When Freedom's fire is dimmed with us;
> And round our country's altar clings
> The damning shade of Slavery's curse?"

Shall we, I ask, shall the American people be the last? I am here not for the purpose of condemning the character of the American people, but for the purpose of trying to protect or vindicate their character. I would to God that there was some feature that I could vindicate. There is no liberty here for me; there is no liberty for those with whom I am associated; there is no liberty for the American Slave; and yet we hear a great deal about liberty! How do the people of the Old World regard the American people? Only a short time since, an American gentleman,

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26. Ahmed Bey decreed the abolition of slavery in Tunisia in 1846; slavery had to that date been common in the Islamic countries of North Africa.

in travelling through Germany, passed the window of a bookstore where he saw a number of pictures. One of them was a cut representing an American Slave on his knees, with chains upon his limbs. Over him stood a white man, with a long whip; and underneath was written, "the latest specimen of American democracy."[27] I ask my audience, who placed that in the hands of those that drew it? It was the people of the United States. Slavery, as it is to be found in this country, has given the serfs of the Old World an opportunity of branding the American people as the most tyrannical people upon God's footstool.

Only a short time since an American man-of-war was anchored in the bay opposite Liverpool. The English came down by hundreds and thousands. The stars and stripes were flying; and there stood those poor persons that had never seen an American man-of-war, but had heard a great deal of American democracy. Some were eulogising the American people; some were calling it the "land of the free and the home of the brave." And while they stood there, one of their number rose up, and pointing his fingers to the American flag, said:

> "United States, your banner wears
> Two emblems, — one of fame;
> Alas, the other that it bears,
> Reminds us of your shame.
> The white man's liberty entyped,
> Stands blazoned by your stars;
> But what's the meaning of your stripes?
> They mean your Negro-scars."[28]

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27. Woodcuts, engravings, and cartoons representing the American slave in chains were common in mid-nineteenth-century books and periodicals throughout the West.

28. From "Epigram to the United States of North America," by the popular Scottish poet Thomas Campbell (1777–1844). Campbell was well known for his progressive political leanings, which included sympathy for the plight of American slaves and for Poles who became refugees as a result of the partition of their nation.

What put that in the mouth of that individual? It was the system of American slavery; it was the action of the American people; the inconsistency of the American people; their profession of liberty, and their practice in opposition to their profession.

I find that the time admonishes me that I am going on too far; but when I get upon this subject, and find myself surrounded by those who are willing to listen, and who seem to sympathise with my down-trodden countrymen, I feel that I have a great duty to discharge.[29] No matter what the people may say upon this subject; no matter what they may say against the great Anti-Slavery movement of this country; I believe it is the Anti-Slavery movement that is calculated to redeem the character of the American people. Much as I have said against the character of the American people this evening, I believe that it is the Anti-Slavery movement of this country that is to redeem its character. Nothing can redeem it but the principles that are advocated by the friends of the Slave in this country.

I look upon this as one of the highest and noblest movements of the age. William Lloyd Garrison, a few years since, planted the tree of Liberty, and that tree has taken root in all branches of government. That tree was not planted for a day, a week, a month, or a year; but to stand till the last chain should fall from the limbs of the last Slave in the United States of America, and in the world. It is a tree that will stand. Yes, it was planted of the very best plant that could be found among the great plants in the world.

> "Our plant is of the cedar,
> That knoweth not decay;
> Its growth shall bless the mountains,
> Till mountains pass away;
> Its top shall greet the sunshine,

29. He would have been forty-five to fifty minutes into his talk by this point, if he was speaking at the pace of modern orators.

Its leaves shall drink the rain,
While on its lower branches
The Slave shall hang his chain."

Yes, it is a plant that will stand. The living tree shall grow up and shall not only liberate the Slave in this country, but shall redeem the character of the American people.

The efforts of the American people not only to keep the Slaves in Slavery, but to add new territory, and to spread the institution of Slavery all over Christendom,—[30] their high professions and their inconsistency, have done more to sadden the hearts of the reformers in the Old World than anything else that could have been thought of. The reformers and lovers of liberty in the Old World look to the American Government, look to the lovers of liberty in America, to aid them in knocking the chains from their own limbs in Europe, to aid them in elevating themselves; but instead of their receiving cooperation from the Government of the United States, instead of their being cheered on by the people of the United States, the people and the Government have done all that they could to oppose liberty, to oppose democracy, and to oppose reform.

Go to the capital of our country, the city of Washington; the capital of the freest government upon the face of the world. Only a few days since, an American mother and her daughter were sold upon the auction-block in that city, and the money was put into the Treasury of the United States of America.[31] Go there and you can scarcely stand an hour but you will see caufles of Slaves driven past the Capitol, and likely as not you will see the foremost one with the stars and stripes in his hand; and yet the American Legislators, the people of the North and of the South, the "assembled wisdom" of the nation, look on and see such things and hold

30. A reference to the efforts of proslavery forces to upset the balance between slave and nonslave states in Congress. See note 10.

31. In his 1853 novel *Clotel* Brown would set his title character in the city's slave pens before her sale. The slave trade was abolished in Washington, D.C., in 1850, although the actual holding of slaves in the district remained legal until 1862. Brown avoided an anachronism in this portion of the novel by setting its action a generation back in time.

their peace; they say not a single word against such oppression, or in favor of liberty.[32]

In conclusion, let me say, that the character of the American people and the influence of Slavery upon that character have been blighting and withering the efforts of all those that favor liberty, reform, and progression. But it has not quite accomplished it. There are those who are willing to stand by the Slave. I look upon the great Anti-Slavery platform as one upon which those who stand, occupy the same position,—I would say, a higher position, than those who put forth their Declaration in 1776, in behalf of American liberty. Yes, the American Abolitionists now occupy a higher and holier position than those who carried on the American Revolution. They do not want that the husband should be any longer sold from his wife. They want that the husband should have a right to protect his wife; that the brother should have a right to protect his sister. They are tired and sick at heart in seeing human beings placed upon the auction-block and sold to the highest bidder. They want that man should be protected. They want that a stop should be put to this system of iniquity and bloodshed; and they are laboring for its overthrow.

I would that every one here could go into the Slave-States, could go where I have been, and see the workings of Slavery upon the Slave. When I get to talking upon this subject I am carried back to the day when I saw a dear mother chained and carried off in a Southern steamboat to supply the cotton, sugar, or rice plantations of the South. I am carried back to the day when a dear sister was sold and carried off in my presence.[33] I stood and looked at her. I could not protect her. I could not offer to protect her. I was a Slave, and the only testimony that I could give her that I sympathised with her, was to allow the tears to flow freely down my cheeks; and the tears flowing freely down her cheeks told me that my affection was reciprocated. I am carried back to the day when I saw three dear brothers sold, and carried off.

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32. Caufles (usually spelled *coffles*) were gangs of slaves or prisoners chained to one another, generally during periods of travel.

33. For a narrative version of these two scenes of forced family separations, see chapter 1.

When I speak of Slavery I am carried back to the time when I saw, day after day, my own fellow-countrymen placed upon the auction-stand; when I saw the bodies, and sinews, and hearts, and the souls of men sold to the highest bidder. I have with me an account of a Slave recently sold upon the auction-stand. The auctioneer could only get a bid of $400, but as he was about to knock her off, the owner of the Slave made his way through those that surrounded him and whispered to the auctioneer. As soon as the owner left, the auctioneer said, "I have failed to tell you all the good qualities of this Slave. I have told you that she was strong, healthy, and hearty, and now I have the pleasure to announce to you that she is very pious. She has got religion."[34] And although, before that, he could only get $400, as soon as they found that she had got religion they commenced bidding upon her, and the bidding went up to $700. The writer says that her body and mind were sold for $400, and her religion was sold for $300. My friends, I am aware that there are people at the North who would sell their religion for a $5 bill, and make money on it; and that those who purchased it would get very much cheated in the end. But the piety of the Slave differs from the piety of the people in the nominally free States. The piety of the Slave is to be a good servant.

This is a subject in which I ask your cooperation. I hope that every individual here will take hold and help carry on the Anti-Slavery movement. We are not those who would ask the men to help us and leave the women at home. We want all to help us. A million of women are in Slavery, and as long as a single woman is in Slavery, every woman in the community should raise her voice against that sin, that crying evil that is degrading her sex. I look to the rising generation. I expect that the rising generation will liberate the Slave. I do not look to the older ones. I have sometimes thought that the sooner we got rid of the older ones the better it would be. The older ones have got their old prejudices, and their old associations, and they cling to them, and seem not to look at the Slave or to care anything about him.

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34. A comparable instance of religiosity as a "value" enhancement occurs in the opening auction scene in *Clotel*; see chapter 4.

Now, fellow-citizens, when you shall return home, and be scattered around your several firesides, and when you have an opportunity to make a remark about what I have said here this evening, all I ask of you is to give the cause, justice; to give what I have said, justice. Give it a fair investigation. If you have not liked my grammar, recollect that I was born and brought up under an institution, where, if an individual was found teaching me, he would have been sent to the State's Prison. Recollect that I was brought up where I had not the privilege of education. Recollect that you have come here to-night to hear a Slave, and not a man, according to the laws of the land; and if the Slave has failed to interest you, charge it not to the race, charge it not to the colored people, but charge it to the blighting influences of Slavery, — that institution that has made me property, and that is making property of three millions of my countrymen at the present day. Charge it upon that institution that is annihilating the minds of three millions of my countrymen. Charge it upon that institution, whether found in the political arena or in the American churches. Charge it upon that institution, cherished by the American people, and looked upon as the essence of Democracy, — upon AMERICAN SLAVERY.

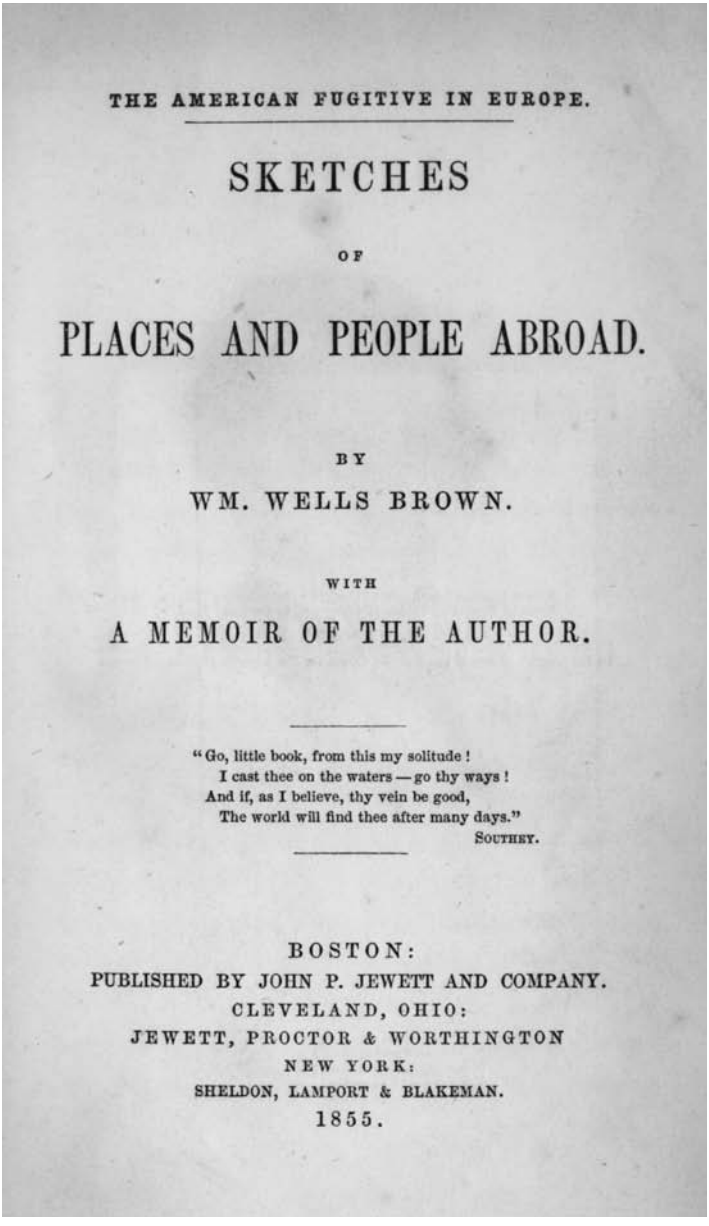
CHAPTER THREE

Writing African American Travelogue

Brown led a life in motion. Even as a bond servant, he traveled widely and viewed far more of the country than did the vast majority of the nation's free citizens. During those first two decades he lived in Kentucky and various locations in Missouri, journeyed extensively along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and spent time in riverfront cities from Louisville to New Orleans. Following self-emancipation in 1834, Brown rarely remained in one place long. Although he maintained a home (and, eventually, a family) in a variety of locations in Ohio, Michigan, New York State, and eastern Massachusetts from 1834 to 1849, his work as an itinerant lecturer frequently carried him considerable distances from his home base for days, weeks, even occasionally months at a time. On several occasions his travels took him as far away as Canada and the Caribbean.

In 1849 he left the United States for England for a stay he expected to last a period of months; it lasted in actuality five years. The primary reason for its prolongation was fear for his safety following passage and implementation back home of the Fugitive Slave Act, the same fear that drove a number of his fellow fugitives, including his friends Ellen and William Craft, to seek refuge overseas. Not until he received final verification about his manumission in summer 1854 did he dare to return to the United States.

Brown was to find the experience of living overseas thoroughly exhilarating, as for the first time in his life he felt himself largely unbound by the restrictions of racial prejudice. These were growing years for Brown, a time to stretch his limbs and expand his horizons. During these five years he cultivated relationships with numerous leading social and political reformers, as well as an array of prominent figures in fields ranging from the arts to



THE AMERICAN FUGITIVE IN EUROPE.

SKETCHES

OF

PLACES AND PEOPLE ABROAD.

BY

WM. WELLS BROWN.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

"Go, little book, from this my solitude!
I cast thee on the waters — go thy ways!
And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,
The world will find thee after many days."

SOUTHEY.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY.
CLEVELAND, OHIO:
JEWETT, PROCTOR & WORTHINGTON
NEW YORK:
SHELDON, LAMPORT & BLAKEMAN.
1855.

Figure 2. Title page of *The American Fugitive in Europe* (1855). Collection of Ezra Greenspan.

diplomacy. He also engaged in self-cultivation, devoting himself to an intense regime of reading, writing, and traveling. Alternately activist and tourist, he crisscrossed Great Britain — and, several times, the European Continent — by train, logging thousands of miles. Riding for once with no fear of relegation to the Jim Crow car, he made it a point to visit as many of the renowned places of history, culture, and religion as he could. His overriding purpose, however, remained unchanged: to contribute his talents to the spread of the antislavery movement, if now from a point of operation in England.

He arrived with letters of introduction to leading antislavery activists across Britain and Ireland. Straight from his debarkation in Liverpool, he entered the local antislavery circuit and remained a part of it for the duration of his residence. He also traveled extensively for his pleasure and edification, even if many of these trips, naturally, were scheduled as extensions of professional lecturing tours. Altogether he gave by his estimation nearly one thousand talks across the British Isles, mostly to crowds numbering in the dozens but on particularly successful tours addressing crowds in the hundreds or thousands (as in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1851). These talks were vital not only to his conscience but to his pocketbook. Unsalaried because of his lack of formal affiliation with any organization (though loosely allied with the Garrisonians), he needed to earn enough money to provide for himself. Beginning in 1851, he also needed to provide for his daughters, whom he had brought to Europe and established in private schools in England and France. He supplemented that primary source of income with royalties earned by the half-dozen books and pamphlets he contracted to publish in Britain and fees received for occasional journalistic pieces he sold to English and American newspapers.

By 1852 he was entering a period of sustained productivity, as he worked his way through an ambitious European travelogue and, quite possibly, into his first novel. In taking up the challenge of presenting a printed account of his experience in Europe as a black man, Brown was well aware of his pioneering status, proudly announcing in the book's preface that his work was "the first production of a Fugitive Slave as a history of travels." What pioneering status as a travel writer meant to Brown, however, is not a self-evident proposition, since he understood authorship, in this genre as in all

others, to be as much a collective as an individual endeavor, and he composed with the understanding that his narrative was preceded by the printed accounts of earlier African travel writers who had taken up residence in the British Isles, most famously Olaudah Equiano.[1] Furthermore, there is evidence in chapter 28 of Brown's travelogue that he was also knowingly following in the footsteps of an unnamed and unacknowledged contemporary Anglo-African travel writer.

Brown pursued his excursions with the aid of guidebooks, and he must also have had a fast familiarity with travelogues, which were one of the most popular genres of mid-nineteenth-century letters. What distinguished Brown's work, as he clearly understood, from the dozens of European travelogues readily available on the transatlantic market was its African American perspective. He was more sparing in interjecting racial matters into his travelogue, however, than was his nearly inveterate writing habit. The most likely explanation for his relative restraint is that travel writing constituted one of the most restrictive, convention-bound modes of popular middle-class literature. During his British residence he generally conducted himself with the decorum expected both in social relations and in this genre of literary discourse. Writing several days after Brown's departure for England, his earnest supporter William Lloyd Garrison unintentionally underscored the delicacy of Brown's situation in introducing him to a British supporter as "very agreeable in his manners, neat in his personal appearance, persuasive in his eloquence and intelligent in his mind."[2] Brown was certainly as presentable as Garrison claimed, but he was also complicatedly particular. If he passed among his hosts as tactful and well mannered, he also carried himself with a deliberate reserve.

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1. Olaudah Equiano (1745–97) was a slave in his early years but spent many years as an adult on the high seas (even navigating the Arctic) before eventually taking up residence in England. His life story, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (London, 1789), was widely popular, passing through multiple editions in the British Isles and the United States well into the nineteenth century.

2. Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, June 20, 1849, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames. 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971–81), 3:626.

As there was more to the man than met the eye, so there was more to the new book. Readers of European travelogues, a primarily middle-class audience, typically came to them professing a reverence for high culture and an expectation that they could pursue it through a vicarious experience of the Grand Tour. Readers of Brown's work would have found their expectations for the most part well met. He supplied them with numerous chapters recording his respectful sightseeing trips to the foundational monuments of European culture and civilization, which must have been meaningful to him too as part of his adult education. But there was also a disquieting quality to parts of his narrative, which cast menacing shadows on the generally sunny British and European landscape: the slave collar he carried in his luggage and, when confronted at customs in Liverpool, produced for public display; the whiff of racial discord at the Paris Peace Conference in which Brown participated as a representative of a country from which he was a fugitive; the presence of slaveholders on the grounds of the ultramodern Crystal Palace; and the unconventional stage performance in the East End of the multitalented Anglo-African actor Joseph Jenkins, who probably never existed anywhere but in Brown's imagination. Such scenes as these give Brown's travelogue its literary distinction — and these are the sources from which the excerpts that follow are drawn.

Brown published the work in London as *Three Years in Europe: Or, Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met* (1852). Shortly after his return to the United States, he brought out a revised, expanded edition that gave a more rounded presentation of his experience and that was more directly addressed to an American audience.

The chapter numbers that appear in subheadings are Brown's; for ease of reference I have supplied the bracketed subtitles.

SELECTIONS FROM

The American Fugitive in Europe

Chapter 1

[The Atlantic Crossing]

The opening chapter of the narrative documents Brown's transatlantic voyage. Such scenes of outward-bound ocean travel were a standard component of the travelogue genre, and Brown's adheres closely for the most part to the generic conventions governing style, tone, and contents. Nevertheless, it commands special interest for its countercurrent of racial identity, which challenges those conventions.

The voyage, as Brown told it, went smoothly for the most part. In actuality, it was a much more unsettling experience than he chose to report. He deliberately omitted mention of the agitated reaction on shipboard that resulted after he disseminated printed copies of his *Narrative of William W. Brown*. He did record, however, several instances after debarkation in which he came in for special scrutiny. One occurred when the customs officer in Liverpool examined his baggage and removed a neck iron that Brown brought with him for use as a visual aid in his antislavery talks. Questions about the purpose of that instrument of punishment elicited explanations from Brown about slavery's institutional practices that upset some of the other passengers. The other instance occurred when a Southern racist, who had previously questioned the wisdom of Brown's participation in an official American delegation attending the Paris Peace Conference, subsequently asked Brown for an introduction to the conference president, Victor Hugo. Brown so enjoyed that unexpected role reversal that he repeatedly interjected the story into lectures he subsequently gave in Britain.

> "Adieu, adieu! — my native shore
> Fades o'er the waters blue;
> The night-winds sigh, the breakers roar,
> And shrieks the wild sea-mew.

The selections that follow come from the first American edition: *The American Fugitive in Europe. Sketches of Places and People Abroad* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1855).

Yon sun that sets upon the sea
We follow in his flight;
Farewell a while to him and thee!
My native land, good-night!"

Childe Harold[1]

On the 18th July, 1849, I took passage in the steamship *Canada*, Captain Judkins, bound for Liverpool.[2] The day was a warm one; so much so, that many persons on board, as well as on shore, stood with their umbrellas up, so intense was the heat of the sun. The ringing of the ship's bell was a signal for us to shake hands with our friends, which we did, and then stepped on the deck of the noble craft. The *Canada* quitted her moorings at half-past twelve, and we were soon in motion. As we were passing out of Boston Bay, I took my stand on the quarter-deck, to take a last farewell (at least for a time) of my native land. A visit to the Old World, up to that time, had seemed but a dream. As I looked back upon the receding land, recollections of the past rushed through my mind in quick succession. From the treatment that I had received from the Americans as a victim of slavery, and the knowledge that I was at that time liable to be seized and again reduced to whips and chains, I had supposed that I would leave the country without any regret; but in this I was mistaken, for when I saw the last thread of communication cut off between me and the land, and the dim shores dying away in the distance, I almost regretted that I was not on shore.

1. The epigraph comes from canto 1, section 13, of *Childe Harold*, by Lord Byron (1788–1824), the English romantic poet whom Brown most frequently quoted. Like many progressives of his generation, Brown admired Byron as a champion of liberty, disregarding scandals in Byron's private life that Brown might not have ignored in other people's.

2. Commissioned in 1848, the *Canada* was a Cunard Line paddle steamer making transatlantic crossings between New York or Boston and Liverpool. Steamships were the fastest mode of transatlantic crossing in the mid–nineteenth century but not always the safest. Brown's crossing on the *Canada* transpired without incident, but in 1854 the ship was twice involved in fatal collisions with other vessels. A frequent traveler, Brown follows the nineteenth-century convention of pairing the names of steamboats and their captains.

An anticipated trip to a foreign country appears pleasant when talking about it, especially when surrounded by friends whom we love; but when we have left them all behind, it does not seem so pleasant. Whatever may be the fault of the government under which we live, and no matter how oppressive her laws may appear, yet we leave our native land (if such it be) with feelings akin to sorrow. With the steamer's powerful engine at work, and with a fair wind, we were speedily on the bosom of the Atlantic, which was as calm and as smooth as our own Hudson in its calmest aspect. We had on board above one hundred passengers, forty of whom were the "Vienneise children"—a troop of dancers.[3] The passengers represented several different nations, English, French, Spaniards, Africans, and Americans. One man, who had the longest mustache that mortal man was ever doomed to wear, especially attracted my attention. He appeared to belong to no country in particular, but was yet the busiest man on board. After viewing for some time the many strange faces round me, I descended to the cabin to look after my luggage, which had been put hurriedly on board. I hope that all who take a trip of so great a distance may be as fortunate as I was, in being supplied with books to read on the voyage. My friends had furnished me with literature, from "Macaulay's History of England" to "Jane Eyre," so that I did not want for books to occupy my time.[4]

A pleasant passage of about thirty hours brought us to Halifax, at six o'clock in the evening.[5] In company with my friend the President of the Oberlin Institute, I took a stroll through the town; and from what little I saw of the people in the streets, I am sure that the taking of the temper-

3. The Viennese Children dance troupe made several tours of U.S. cities in the late 1840s, when an increasing number of European singers, musicians, and actors came to perform on the American stage.

4. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–59), prolific man of letters and politician, was one of Victorian England's best-regarded historians. His immensely successful, five-volume *History of England* (1849–61) was reprinted across the English-speaking world.

Jane Eyre (1847), by the English writer Charlotte Brontë (1816–55), was a popular and critically acclaimed novel in Great Britain and the United States.

5. Halifax, capital of the maritime province of Nova Scotia, was and is Canada's primary Atlantic port.

ance pledge would do them no injury.[6] Our stay at Halifax was short. Having taken in a few sacks of coals, the mails, and a limited number of passengers, we were again out, and soon at sea.

As the steamer moved gently from the shore I felt like repeating those lines of a distinguished poet:

> "With thee, my bark, I'll swiftly go
> Athwart the foaming brine;
> Nor care what land thou bear'st me to,
> So not again to mine.
> Welcome, welcome, ye dark blue waves!
> And when you fail my sight
> Welcome ye deserts and ye caves
> My native land, good-night!"[7]

Nothing occurred during the passage to mar the pleasure which we anticipated from a voyage by sea in such fine weather. And, after a splendid run of seven days more, I heard the welcome cry of "Land a-head." It was early in the morning, and I was not yet out of bed; but I had no wish to remain longer in my berth. Although the passage had been unprecedently [sic] short, yet this news was hailed with joy by all on board.

For my own part, I was soon on deck. Away in the distance, and on our larboard quarter, were the gray hills of old Ireland. Yes; we were in sight of the land of Curran, Emmet and O'Connell.[8] While I rejoiced with the other passengers at the sight of land, and the near approach to the end

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6. Oberlin Institute, renamed Oberlin College in 1850, was founded by reformers in rural Ohio in 1833 on a progressive platform: to admit students to higher education on a gender- and race-blind basis. The Oberlin president with whom Brown made the transatlantic crossing was Asa Mahan (1799–1889), founding president of the institute, fiery minister, and ardent abolitionist. In his formal address to the Paris Peace Conference, Mahan made an appeal that was several generations ahead of its time in its call for the establishment of a permanent arbitration tribunal for international conflicts.

7. Also from Bryon's *Childe Harold* (canto 1, section 13).

8. Brown groups John Philpot Curran (1750–1817) or perhaps his daughter Sarah (1782–1808), Robert Emmet (1778–1803), and Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847) as Irish patriots fighting for freedom from English control of their country.

of our voyage, I felt low-spirited, because it reminded me of the great distance I was from home, and of dear ones left behind. But the experience of above twenty years' travelling had prepared me to undergo what most persons must, in visiting a strange country. This was the last day but one that we were to be on board; and, as if moved by the sight of land, all seemed to be gathering their different things together — brushing up their old clothes and putting on their new ones, as if this would bring them any sooner to the end of their journey.

The last night on board was the most pleasant, apparently, that we had experienced; probably, because it was the last. The moon was in her meridian splendor, pouring her broad light over the calm sea; while near to us, on our starboard side, was a ship, with her snow-white sails spread aloft, and stealing through the water like a thing of life. What can present a more picturesque view than two vessels at sea on a moonlight night, and within a few rods of each other? With a gentle breeze, and the powerful engine at work, we seemed to be flying to the embrace of our British neighbors.

The next morning I was up before the sun, and found that we were within a few miles of Liverpool. The taking of a pilot on board at eleven o'clock warned us to prepare to quit our ocean palace, and seek other quarters. At a little past three o'clock, the ship cast anchor, and we were all tumbled, bag and baggage, into a small steamer, and in a few moments were at the door of the custom-house. The passage had only been nine days and twenty-two hours, the quickest on record at that time, yet it was long enough.[9] I waited nearly three hours before my name was called, and when it was I unlocked my trunks and handed them over to one of the officers, whose dirty hands made no improvement on the work of the laundress. First one article was taken out, and then another, till an *Iron Collar* that had been worn by a female slave on the banks of the Mississippi was hauled out, and this democratic instrument of torture

9. Some steamship captains and proprietors treated the transatlantic crossing as a competition, one that an increasingly time-conscious public on both sides of the Atlantic followed with interest through reports in the press.

became the centre of attraction; so much so, that instead of going on with the examination, all hands stopped to look at the "Negro Collar."

Several of my countrymen who were standing by were not a little displeased at answers which I gave to questions on the subject of slavery; but they held their peace. The interest created by the appearance of the iron collar closed the examination of my luggage. As if afraid that they would find something more hideous, they put the custom-house mark on each piece, and passed them out, and I was soon comfortably installed at Brown's Temperance Hotel, Clayton-square.[10]

No person of my complexion can visit this country without being struck with the marked difference between the English and the Americans. The prejudice which I have experienced on all and every occasion in the United States, and to some extent on board the *Canada*, vanished as soon as I set foot on the soil of Britain. In America I had been bought and sold as a slave in the Southern States. In the so-called Free States, I had been treated as one born to occupy an inferior position,—in steamers, compelled to take my fare on the deck; in hotels, to take my meals in the kitchen; in coaches, to ride on the outside; in railways, to ride in the "negro-car"; and in churches, to sit in the "negro-pew." But no sooner was I on British soil, than I was recognized as a man, and an equal. The very dogs in the streets appeared conscious of my manhood. Such is the difference, and such is the change that is brought about by a trip of nine days in an Atlantic steamer.

I was not more struck with the treatment of the people than with the appearance of the great seaport of the world. The gray stone piers and docks, the dark look of the magnificent warehouses, the substantial appearance of everything around, causes one to think himself in a new world instead of the old. Everything in Liverpool looks old, yet nothing is worn out. The beautiful villas on the opposite side of the river, in the

10. Brown's Temperance Hotel was regarded in the antislavery community as a friendly place for fugitive slaves. Frederick Douglass had stayed there in spring 1847 on the eve of his return home from a nearly two-year residence in England.

vicinity of Birkenhead, together with the countless number of vessels in the river, and the great ships to be seen in the stream, give life and animation to the whole scene.[11]

Everything in and about Liverpool seems to be built for the future as well as the present. We had time to examine but few of the public buildings, the first of which was the custom-house, an edifice that would be an ornament to any city in the world.

Excerpt from Chapter 3

[The Paris Peace Conference]

The centerpiece of this selection concerns Brown's firsthand account of the 1849 Paris Peace Conference, an important early event in the history of the international peace movement. Brown had only recently disembarked in England when he made his way to France to join the twenty-three-person U.S. delegation taking part in an event that he and the other delegates believed was full of promise. The president of the conference was the author Victor Hugo, one of the most esteemed men of their generation and quite possibly a model for Brown of a writer-activist, and the event was receiving international attention.

The leader of the U.S. delegation was Elihu Burrit, a pioneering figure in the international peace movement and an ardent antislavery activist. For that matter, the delegation not only contained an oversized proportion of antislavery activists but was actually multiracial, one of the few racially integrated delegations to that date in the history of the United States. Among the other American delegates were the Reverend James Pennington, a former fugitive slave who had written a well-regarded slave narrative and established himself as a leader in the antislavery movement; and probably Alexander Crummell, a leading black intellectual and supporter of emigration to West Africa.

Brown addressed the conference in a speech that received commentary in Paris's *La Presse*, *Galignani's Messenger* (the leading English-language newspaper of Paris), and the *Times* of London, and he comported himself so impressively in Paris that he

11. Birkenhead, on the left bank of the River Mersey opposite Liverpool, was the city's port.

earned the favorable attention of Hugo, Richard Cobden, and the wife of Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as of the U.S. delegation. Much as Brown enjoyed the attention and the opportunity to interact with some of the leading minds and spirits of his time, his final evaluation of the conference was negative. He departed Paris disappointed that the conference had broken up without formulating any plans for sustained activity. That omission contrasted with the level of commitment to organized action to which he was accustomed in the antislavery movement.

At eleven o'clock the same day, the Peace Congress met in the Salle St. Cecile, Rue de la St. Lazare.[12] The Parisians have no "Exeter Hall"; in fact, there is no private hall in the city of any size, save this, where such a meeting could be held.[13] This hall had been fitted up for the occasion. The room is long, and at one end has a raised platform; and at the opposite end is a gallery, with seats raised one above another. On one side of the hall was a balcony with sofas, which were evidently the "reserved seats."

The hall was filled at an early hour with the delegates, their friends, and a good sprinkling of the French.[14] Occasionally, small groups of gentlemen would make their appearance on the platform, until it soon appeared that there was little room left for others; and yet the officers of the Convention had not come in. The different countries were, many of them, represented here. England, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, and the United States, had each their delegates. The assembly began to give signs of impatience, when very soon the train of officials made their appearance amid great applause. Victor Hugo led the way, followed by M. Duguerry, curé of the Madeleine, Elihu

12. The Salle Sainte-Cecile, the splendid meeting place of the congress, was a spacious concert hall located in the heart of Paris. For this event it was festooned with the flags of the various nations.

13. London's Exeter Hall was a favorite assembly place of British abolitionists. Brown frequently attended and sometimes addressed antislavery meetings there.

14. Approximately fifteen hundred people attended the opening day's highly publicized activities.

Burritt, and a host of others of less note.[15] Victor Hugo took the chair as President of the Congress, supported by vice-presidents from the several nations represented. Mr. Richard, the secretary, read a dry report of the names of societies, committees, etc., which was deemed the opening of the Convention.

The president then arose, and delivered one of the most impressive and eloquent appeals in favor of peace that could possibly be imagined. The effect produced upon the minds of all present was such as to make the author of "*Notre Dame de Paris*" a great favorite with the Congress.[16] An English gentleman near me said to his friend, "I can't understand a word of what he says, but is it not good?" Victor Hugo concluded his speech amid the greatest enthusiasm on the part of the French, which was followed by hurras in the old English style. The Convention was successively addressed by the President of the Brussels Peace Society; President Mahan, of the Oberlin (Ohio) Institute, U.S.; Henry Vincent; and Richard Cobden.[17] The latter was not only the *lion* of the English delegation, but

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15. Duguerry was the *curé* (that is, parish priest) of the important Madeleine district of Paris. Brown was greatly impressed by his speech at the congress and quoted him in the next chapter of his book as saying that "the question of general pacification was built on truth — truth which emanated from God — and it were as vain to undertake to prevent air from expanding as to check the progress of truth. It must and would prevail." Ironically, Duguerry was executed during the uprising of the Paris Commune in May 1871.

The Madeleine was a monumental neoclassical edifice originally commissioned by Napoleon in 1806 and subsequently put to various public uses before being consecrated as a church in 1842.

Elihu Burrit (1810–79), a wealthy social activist from Connecticut, was involved in some of the same causes as Brown, including antislavery, temperance, and — the cause that brought them together in Paris — world peace.

16. Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (more familiarly known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) was one of the nineteenth-century's most popular novels.

17. Henry Vincent (1813–78) was a radical English reformer and orator active chiefly in the agitation for workers' rights.

Richard Cobden (1804–65) was a radical English social theorist and reformer, writer, and member of Parliament. When Brown met him, Cobden was one of the foremost figures in the international peace movement.

the great man of the Convention. When Mr. Cobden speaks there is no want of hearers. The great power of this gentleman lies in his facts and his earnestness, for he cannot be called an eloquent speaker. Mr. Cobden addressed the Congress first in French, then in English; and, with the single exception of Mr. Ewart, M.P., was the only one of the English delegation that could speak to the French in their own language.[18]

The first day's proceedings were brought to a close at five o'clock, when the numerous audience dispersed—the citizens to their homes, and the delegates to see the sights.

I was not a little amused at an incident that occurred at the close of the first session. On the passage from America, there were in the same steamer with me several Americans, and among these three or four appeared to be much annoyed at the fact that I was a passenger, and enjoying the company of white persons; and, although I was not openly insulted, I very often heard the remark, that "That nigger had better be on his master's farm," and "What could the American Peace Society be thinking about, to send a black man as a delegate to Paris?" Well, at the close of the first sitting of the convention, and just as I was leaving Victor Hugo, to whom I had been introduced by an M.P., I observed near me a gentleman with his hat in hand, whom I recognized as one of the passengers who had crossed the Atlantic with me in the *Canada*, and who appeared to be the most horrified at having a negro for a fellow-passenger.[19] This gentleman, as I left M. Hugo, stepped up to me and said, "How do you do, Mr. Brown?" "You have the advantage of me," said I. "O, don't you know me? I was a fellow-passenger with you from America; I wish you would give me an introduction to Victor Hugo and Mr. Cobden." I need not inform you that I declined introducing this pro-slavery American to these distinguished men. I only allude to this, to

18. William Ewart (1798–1869) was a long-time member of Parliament representing Dumfries, Scotland. A progressive legislator, he worked to improve the living conditions of common people by fighting for the spread of public education and libraries.

19. Brown identified this hypocrite in public letters sent home as Judge Thomas Withers Chinn (1793–1852), a Louisiana slaveholder who was at the time on his way to fill his post as a Whig-appointed attaché in Naples.

show what a change came over the dreams of my white American brother by crossing the ocean. The man who would not have been seen walking with me in the streets of New York, and who would not have shaken hands with me with a pair of tongs while on the passage from the United States, could come with hat in hand in Paris, and say, "I was your fellow-passenger."

Chapter 17

[Visit to the Great Exhibition in London, 1851]

Brown was one of millions of visitors to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, the first world's fair. An unprecedented spectacle designed to represent modernity on a grand scale, it featured the mid–nineteenth century's largest display of science, industry, and culture. As such, it attracted not just exhibits but tourists from numerous countries around the world. While walking the grounds, Brown proved to be as fascinated by the heterogeneity of the human scene as by the mechanical wonders of the age, which is clear in this enthusiastic account of his visit.

Brown seems to have entered readily into the spirit of the event. Its message of human progress spoke powerfully to his experience of the world. But the Great Exhibition did have a small minority of critics, such as Karl Marx, who derided its display as proof of capitalistic commoditization and worker exploitation. Although Brown knew a great deal experientially about these things, he offered for the most part an uncritical account of the exhibition. Brown's critical edge returns only when he recounts his chance encounter on a public conveyance with Thomas Carlyle, who was reviled by abolitionists following the publication of "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1851).[20]

> "And there are dresses splendid but fantastical,
> Masks of all times and nations, Turks and Jews,
> And Harlequins and Clowns with feats gymnastical;
> Greeks, Romans, Yankee-doodles, and Hindoos."[21]

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20. Carlyle originally published the essay in 1849 under the more polite title "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question."

21. From section 3 of *Beppo* (1818), by Lord Byron.

Presuming that you will expect from me some account of the great World's Fair, I take my pen to give you my own impressions, although I am afraid that anything which I may say about this "lion of the day" will fall far short of a description. On Monday last, I quitted my lodgings at an early hour, and started for the Crystal Palace.[22] The day was fine, such as we seldom experience in London, with a clear sky, and invigorating air, whose vitality was as rousing to the spirits as a blast from the "horn of Astolpho."[23] Although it was not yet ten o'clock when I entered Piccadilly, every omnibus was full, inside and out, and the street was lined with one living stream, as far as the eye could reach, all wending their way to the "Glass House." No metropolis in the world presents such facilities as London for the reception of the Great Exhibition now collected within its walls. Throughout its myriads of veins the stream of industry and toil pulses with sleepless energy. Every one seems to feel that this great capital of the world is the fittest place wherein they might offer homage to the dignity of toil. I had already begun to feel fatigued by my pedestrian excursions as I passed "Apsley House," the residence of the Duke of Wellington, and emerged into Hyde Park.[24]

I had hoped that on getting into the Park I would be out of the crowd that seemed to press so heavily in the street. But in this I was mistaken. I here found myself surrounded by and moving with an overwhelming mass, such as I had never before witnessed. And, away in the distance, I beheld a dense crowd, and above every other object was seen the lofty summit of the Crystal Palace. The drive in the Park was lined with princely-looking vehicles of every description. The drivers in their bright red and gold uniforms, the pages and footmen in their blue trou-

22. Nicknamed the Palace of Glass, the Crystal Palace was an immense modern building of glass and steel designed to showcase the exhibits of the world's fair and to herald the accomplishments of the Industrial Revolution.

23. Astolpho was a fictitious character in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) who used his magical horn to accomplish feats of heroism.

24. Apsley House, one of the stateliest residences in London, was the home of the Duke of Wellington until his death in 1852. It today houses the Wellington Museum in the portion of the mansion open to the public.

sers and white silk stockings, and the horses dressed up in their neat, silver-mounted harness, made the scene altogether one of great splendor. I was soon at the door, paid my shilling, and entered the building at the south end of the transept. For the first ten or twenty minutes, I was so lost in astonishment, and absorbed in pleasing wonder, that I could do nothing but gaze up and down the vista of the noble building. The Crystal Palace resembles in some respects the interior of the cathedrals of this country. One long avenue from east to west is intercepted by a transept, which divides the building into two nearly equal parts. This is the greatest building the world ever saw, before which the Pyramids of Egypt, and the Colossus of Rhodes must hide their diminished heads.[25] The palace was not full at any time during the day, there being only sixty-four thousand persons present. Those who love to study the human countenance in all its infinite varieties can find ample scope for the indulgence of their taste, by a visit to the World's Fair. All countries are there represented — Europeans, Asiatics, Americans and Africans, with their numerous subdivisions.[26] Even the exclusive Chinese, with his hair braided, and hanging down his back, has left the land of his nativity, and is seen making long strides through the Crystal Palace, in his wooden-bottomed shoes. Of all places of curious costumes and different fashions, none has ever yet presented such a variety as this Exhibition. No dress is too absurd to be worn in this place.

There is a great deal of freedom in the Exhibition. The servant who walks behind his mistress through the Park feels that he can crowd against her in the Exhibition. The queen and the day laborer, the prince and the merchant, the peer and the pauper, the Celt and the Saxon, the Greek and the Frank, the Hebrew and the Russ, all meet here upon terms of perfect equality. This amalgamation of rank, this kindly blending of

25. Reference was commonly made in the early 1850s to the Crystal Palace as the modern world's equivalent to such wonders of the ancient world as the Egyptian pyramids and the Colossus of Rhodes.

26. Altogether twenty-three countries were represented at the fair, an extraordinary international showing by the standards of that era.

interests, and forgetfulness of the cold formalities of ranks and grades, cannot but be attended with the very best results. I was pleased to see such a goodly sprinkling of my own countrymen in the Exhibition — I mean colored men and women — well-dressed, and moving about with their fairer brethren. This, some of our pro-slavery Americans did not seem to relish very well. There was no help for it. As I walked through the American part of the Crystal Palace some of our Virginia neighbors eyed me closely and with jealous looks, especially as an English lady was leaning on my arm.[27] But their sneering looks did not disturb me in the least. I remained the longer in their department, and criticized the bad appearance of their goods the more. Indeed, the Americans, as far as appearance goes, are behind every other country in the Exhibition. The "Greek Slave" is the only production of art which the United States has sent.[28] And it would have been more to their credit had they kept that at home. In so vast a place as the Great Exhibition one scarcely knows what to visit first, or what to look upon last. After wandering about through the building for five hours, I sat down in one of the galleries and looked at the fine marble statue of Virginius, with the knife in his hand and about to take the life of his beloved and beautiful daughter, to save her from the hands of Appius Claudius.[29] The admirer of genius will linger for hours among the great variety of statues in the long avenue. Large statues

27. Brown was accompanied that day by the English ophthalmologist John Bishop Estlin (1785–1855) and his daughter Mary Ann, warm friends to Brown and ardent allies of the American antislavery movement.

28. *The Greek Slave* was a nude alabaster statue representing a young Greek female slave bound in chains by the Turks. Its popularity catapulted its creator, the expatriate American sculptor Hiram Powers (1805–73), to fame in the early 1850s. Brown was offended by the ecstatic reception that replicas of the statue received when exhibited in cities around the United States, which he considered evidence of hypocrisy from a nation vaunting freedom in foreign lands while tolerating slavery at home.

29. In Roman history and folklore Virginius was a centurion who fatally stabbed his daughter Virginia to prevent her violation by the ruler Appius Claudius. The tale has remained widely popular through the centuries, but Brown had specific reasons to find it meaningful and referred to it in multiple writings.

of Lords Eldon and Stowell, carved out of solid marble, each weighing above twenty tons, are among the most gigantic in the building.[30]

I was sitting with my four hundred paged guide-book before me, and looking down upon the moving mass, when my attention was called to a small group of gentlemen standing near the statue of Shakespeare, one of whom wore a white coat and hat, and had flaxen hair, and trousers rather short in the legs.[31] The lady by my side, and who had called my attention to the group, asked if I could tell what country this odd-looking gentleman was from. Not wishing to run the risk of a mistake, I was about declining to venture an opinion, when the reflection of the sun against a mirror, on the opposite side, threw a brilliant light upon the group, and especially on the face of the gentleman in the white coat, and I immediately recognized under the brim of the white hat the features of Horace Greeley, Esq., of the New York *Tribune*.[32] His general appearance was as much out of the English style as that of the Turk whom I had seen but a moment before, in his bag-like trousers, shuffling along in his slippers. But oddness in dress is one of the characteristics of the Great Exhibition.

Among the many things in the Crystal Palace, there are some which receive greater attention than others, around which may always be seen

30. Lord Eldon (1751–1838), né John Scott, was an English success story. Born into modest circumstances, he became a wealthy peer and in 1800 Lord Chancellor of England, an office he held for nearly twenty-seven years and in which he proved himself a formidable opponent of reform.

Lord Stowell (1745–1836), né William Scott and the brother of John Scott, was a distinguished barrister whose legal rulings on a wide variety of issues carried great weight in his day and are still consulted today.

31. Brown followed the growing custom of mid-nineteenth-century travelers of consulting guidebooks for purposes of general instruction. A number of enterprising English publishers brought out illustrated guidebooks of the Great Exhibition.

32. Horace Greeley (1811–72) was the energetic editor of the *New York Tribune*, arguably the most influential daily newspaper in the United States. Greeley was known for his eccentricities of manner and dress, but he was a man of substance whose progressive views on race and labor commanded national attention.

large groups of the visitors. The first of these is the Koh-i-noor, the "Mountain of Light."[33] This is the largest and most valuable diamond in the world, said to be worth two million pounds sterling. It is indeed a great source of attraction to those who go to the Exhibition for the first time, but it is doubtful whether it obtains such admiration afterwards. We saw more than one spectator turn away with the idea that, after all, it was only a piece of glass. After some jamming, I got a look at the precious jewel; and although in a brass-grated cage, strong enough to hold a lion, I found it to be no larger than the third of a hen's egg. Two policemen remain by its side day and night.

The finest thing in the Exhibition is the "Veiled Vestal," a statue of a woman carved in marble, with a veil over her face, and so neatly done that it looks as if it had been thrown over after it was finished.[34] The Exhibition presents many things which appeal to the eye and touch the heart, and altogether it is so decorated and furnished as to excite the dullest mind, and satisfy the most fastidious.

England has contributed the most useful and substantial articles; France, the most beautiful; while Russia, Turkey and the West Indies, seem to vie with each other in richness. China and Persia are not behind. Austria has also contributed a rich and beautiful stock. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the smaller states of Europe, have all tried to outdo themselves in sending goods to the World's Fair. In machinery, England has no competitor. In art, France is almost alone in the Exhibition, setting aside England.

In natural productions and provisions, America stands alone in her glory. There lies her pile of canvassed hams; whether they were wood or real, we could not tell. There are her barrels of salt beef and pork, her beautiful white lard, her Indian-corn and corn-meal, her rice and tobacco, her beef-tongues, dried peas, and a few bags of cotton. The contributors from the United States seemed to have forgotten that this was an exhibition of

33. The Kohinoor Diamond, of legendary Asian origin, was one of the world's most famous jewels even before its celebrated exhibition at the 1851 world's fair. Owned at the time by Queen Victoria, it subsequently passed down the royal family line and at present is displayed in the Tower of London as a fixture on the Queen Mother's crown.

34. The *Veiled Vestal*, a porcelain statue by the Italian sculptor Raffaelle Monti, was one of the most popular works of art on display in the Crystal Palace.

art, or they most certainly would not have sent provisions. But the United States takes the lead in the contributions, as no other country has sent in provisions. The finest thing contributed by our countrymen is a large piece of silk with an eagle painted upon it, surrounded by stars and stripes.

After remaining more than five hours in the great temple, I turned my back upon the richly-laden stalls, and left the Crystal Palace. On my return home I was more fortunate than in the morning, inasmuch as I found a seat for my friend and myself in an omnibus. And even my ride in the close omnibus was not without interest. For I had scarcely taken my seat, when my friend, who was seated opposite me, with looks and gesture informed me that we were in the presence of some distinguished person. I eyed the countenances of the different persons, but in vain, to see if I could find any one who by his appearance showed signs of superiority over his fellow-passengers. I had given up the hope of selecting the person of note, when another look from my friend directed my attention to a gentleman seated in the corner of the omnibus. He was a tall man, with strongly-marked features, hair dark and coarse. There was a slight stoop of the shoulder—that bend which is almost always a characteristic of studious men. But he wore upon his countenance a forbidding and disdainful frown, that seemed to tell one that he thought himself better than those about him. His dress did not indicate a man of high rank; and had we been in America, I would have taken him for an Ohio farmer.

While I was scanning the features and general appearance of the gentleman, the omnibus stopped and put down three or four of the passengers, which gave me an opportunity of getting a seat by the side of my friend, who, in a low whisper, informed me that the gentleman whom I had been eying so closely was no less a person than Thomas Carlyle.[35] I

35. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was one of the leading writers, intellectuals, and social commentators of his generation. His reputation reached the United States in the 1830s and 1840s with a series of major works widely reprinted here. The works Brown had read, *Sartor Resartus* (1836), *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), and *Past and Present* (1847), were among Carlyle's most influential books. Carlyle's American reputation gradually soured, however, among many progressives, who found his heterodox views on various issues, including race and American nationalism, unacceptable. Brown's criticism of Carlyle in this passage, in turn, drew some criticism in the British press.

had read his "Hero-worship," and "Past and Present," and had formed a high opinion of his literary abilities. But his recent attack upon the emancipated people of the West Indies, and his laborious article in favor of the reestablishment of the lash and slavery, had created in my mind a dislike for the man, and I almost regretted that we were in the same omnibus.[36] In some things Mr. Carlyle is right: but in many he is entirely wrong. As a writer, Mr. Carlyle is often monotonous and extravagant. He does not exhibit a new view of nature, or raise insignificant objects into importance; but generally takes commonplace thoughts and events, and tries to express them in stronger and statelier language than others. He holds no communion with his kind, but stands alone, without mate or fellow. He is like a solitary peak, all access to which is cut off. He exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy. Mr. Carlyle seems chiefly to try how he shall display his own powers, and astonish mankind, by starting new trains of speculation, or by expressing old ones so as not to be understood. He cares little what he says, so as he can say it differently from others. To read his works, is one thing; to understand them, is another. If any one thinks that I exaggerate, let him sit for an hour over "Sartor Resartus," and if he does not rise from its pages, place his three or four dictionaries on the shelf, and say I am right, I promise never again to say a word against Thomas Carlyle. He writes one page in favor of reform, and ten against it. He would hang all prisoners to get rid of them; yet the inmates of the prisons and "workhouses are better off than the poor." His heart is with the poor; yet the blacks of the West Indies should be taught that if they will not raise sugar and cotton by their own free will, "Quashy should have the whip applied to him."[37] He frowns upon the reformatory speakers upon the boards of Exeter Hall; yet he is the prince of reformers. He hates heroes and assassins; yet Cromwell was an

36. Great Britain emancipated slaves in its West Indies possessions in 1833.

37. Quashy was a stereotypical name applied to slaves. Its currency was greatly increased by its conspicuous use in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

angel, and Charlotte Corday a saint.[38] He scorns everything, and seems to be tired of what he is by nature, and tries to be what he is not.

Chapter 28

[Impressions of the Anglo-African Actor Joseph Jenkins]

Chapter 28 may be the most remarkable piece of writing in the book. In it Brown presents an animated sketch of a man named Joseph Jenkins, purportedly an ex-slave of African origin now living in London and manifestly a man of multiple talents and shifting identities. Brown's fascination mounts as he encounters Jenkins repeatedly on the city streets laboring in a variety of menial roles, but Brown's imagination is most fully captivated when he enters a theater to see *Othello* and finds Jenkins playing the lead role.

Well it should. Othello, the Moor, was the greatest role then available to an actor of African descent; it was also a particularly challenging one for a black actor to perform on the nineteenth-century London stage. As the play's title character encounters visceral resistance from the established citizenry of Venice, so a black actor coming to the role of Othello in the capital of a new maritime empire faced initial skepticism in attempting to command the stage. To judge from Brown's description, Jenkins, transformed before his eyes from street cleaner to African prince, was a mesmerizing presence, even if the stage was the second-tier Eagle Saloon rather than Drury Lane.[39] Moreover, seeing this transformation through the eyes of Brown, who

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38. Carlyle wrote a popular biography of Oliver Cromwell (*Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 1845). Cromwell (1599–1658), a leader of the English Puritans, played a decisive military and political role in the abolition of the monarchy during the English Civil War and served as Lord Protector from 1653 until his death.

Charlotte Corday (1768–93), a French aristocrat sympathetic to many of the ideals of the French Revolution, became a heroine to many for her assassination of the radical leader Jean Paul Marat. Unapologetic and stoical during her incarceration and trial, she was guillotined.

39. Brown also witnessed performances of Othello and other Shakespearian roles by Ira Aldridge, his generation's premier actor of African origin. Unlike Jenkins, Aldridge performed at the leading theaters of London. Brown included a complimentary sketch of Aldridge in *The Black Man*.

in various ways parallels Jenkins as an ex-slave and performer, enhances the drama taking place both on and off stage.

There remains one drama that passes unmentioned in the pages of this chapter: the drama behind the text itself. What kind of African prince is "Joseph Jenkins"? What kind of performer is he? And what kind of performer, finally, is Brown? Brown professes himself so curious about Jenkins that he returns to Cheapside the night after the performance to look Jenkins up in his daytime role as street salesman. But not until another year passes does Brown finally find the way to take the man's measure. The opportunity comes in a second act of serendipity in the world's largest city when Brown enters an out-of-the-way church one Sunday evening and unexpectedly encounters Jenkins in the pulpit. The two men strike up a warm conversation afterward, leaving Jenkins comfortable enough with his interlocutor to reveal his life story. It is a gripping story, a mini fugitive slave tale with pastoral Africa as its point of origin and metropolitan England as its conclusion. But is it authentic, and is Jenkins the man he claims to be? That the tale of origins is partially lifted without attribution from the published life narrative of a genuine African fugitive, who was sold into slavery and brought to Scotland, raises complex doubts and questions about the tale, its teller, and — the most likely source of its deceptions — the author.[40]

"Look here, upon this picture, and on this."

Hamlet[41]

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40. The African fugitive's story is told in *Incidents Connected with the Life of Selim Aga, a Native of Central Africa* (Aberdeen, Scotland: W. Bennett, 1846). In contrast to Brown's account of Jenkins, the authenticity of Selim Aga's self-published memoir is beyond doubt. Aga was enslaved in his native Sudan around 1837. After passing through many hands, he was purchased by the family of the British consul in Alexandria, Egypt, which sent him to relatives in Scotland, where Aga was freed and educated. He left Scotland in 1846, traveling widely on expeditions to Africa and eventually becoming a trusted aid to the famed explorer Richard Burton on his African expeditions during the early 1860s. Burton is the source of the report that Aga was killed in Liberia in 1875.

41. In this important scene (3.4.53) Hamlet is forcibly calling his mother's attention to the contrasting images of his father and uncle, brothers by Hamlet's accounting and serial husbands presumably by his mother's. Brown's use of this verse as a chapter epigraph may suggest a comparison of Jenkins and himself.

No one accustomed to pass through Cheapside could fail to have noticed a good-looking man, neither black nor white, engaged in distributing bills to the thousands who throng that part of the city of London. While strolling through Cheapside, one morning, I saw, for the fiftieth time, Joseph Jenkins, the subject of this chapter, handing out his bills to all who would take them as he thrust them into their hands. I confess that I was not a little amused, and stood for some moments watching and admiring his energy in distributing his papers. A few days after, I saw the same individual in Chelsea, sweeping a crossing; here, too, he was equally as energetic as when I met him in the city. Some days later, while going through Kensington, I heard rather a sweet, musical voice singing a familiar psalm, and on looking round was not a little surprised to find that it was the Cheapside bill-distributor and Chelsea crossing-sweeper. He was now singing hymns, and selling religious tracts. I am fond of patronizing genius, and therefore took one of his tracts and paid him for a dozen.

During the following week, I saw, while going up the city road, that Shakespeare's tragedy of Othello was to be performed at the Eagle Saloon that night, and that the character of the Moor was to be taken by "*Selim, an African prince.*"[42] Having no engagement that evening, I resolved at once to attend, to witness the performance of the "African Roscius," as he was termed on the bills.[43] It was the same interest that had induced me to go to the Italian opera to see Madames Sontag and Grisi in Norma, and

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42. The Eagle Saloon, containing the Grecian Theater, was one of the newer theaters in London, built to accommodate the city's burgeoning interest in the stage. Located on Open Road in the East End, it typically hosted lighter fare and provided less respectable surroundings than did more fashionable theaters such as Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket.

The reference to the African prince Selim is presumably generic—unless Brown was winkingly drawing attention to Selim Aga.

43. Quintus Roscius (d. 62 BCE) was born a slave but became the greatest comic actor in Rome. The tag phrase "African Roscius" was transportable, but during this period it was generally applied to Ira Aldridge.

to visit Drury Lane to see Macready take leave of the stage.[44] My expectations were screwed up to the highest point. The excitement caused by the publication of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had prepared the public for anything in the African line, and I felt that the *prince* would be sure of a good audience; and in this I was not disappointed, for, as I took my seat in one of the boxes near the stage, I saw that the house was crammed with an orderly company.[45] The curtain was already up when I entered, and Iago and Roderigo were on the stage. After a while Othello came in, and was greeted with thunders of applause, which he very gracefully acknowledged. Just black enough to take his part without coloring his face, and being tall, with a good figure and an easy carriage, a fine, full and musical voice, he was well adapted to the character of Othello. I immediately recognized in the countenance of the Moor a face that I had seen before, but could not at the moment tell where. Who could this "prince" be, thought I. He was too black for Douglass, not black enough for Ward, not tall enough for Garnet, too calm for Delany, figure, though fine, not genteel enough for Remond.[46] However, I was soon satisfied as to who the *star* was. Reader, would you think it? it was no less a person than Mr. Jenkins, the bill-distributor from Cheapside, and crossing-sweeper from Chelsea! For my own part, I was overwhelmed with amazement, and it was some time before I could realize the fact. He soon showed that he possessed

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44. Brown groups together two of the greatest opera stars of the day, the German Henriette Sontag (1805–54) and the Italian Giulia Grisi (1811–69).

Norma, an opera by Vincenzo Bellini (1801–35) first staged in 1831, was one of the most popular works in the Victorian repertoire.

The original Drury Lane, the longest-lived name in London theater history, dates to 1663. In the 1850s it remained one of the city's most important theaters.

George Macready (1793–1873) was one of the leading actors in Victorian England. His fame was nearly as great in the United States, which he toured in 1826, 1843, and 1848–49.

45. Brown may be referring to the runaway success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only as a novel but also as a theatrical. It was dramatized soon after its book publication and was performed widely, including in London.

46. Brown is playfully conjuring the figures of some of the most powerful African Americans in the antislavery movement: Frederick Douglass (1818–95), Samuel Ringgold Ward (b. 1817), Henry Highland Garnet (1815–82), Martin Robison Delany (1812–85), and Charles Lenox Remond (1810–78).

great dramatic power and skill; and his description to the senate of how he won the affections of the gentle Desdemona stamped him at once as an actor of merit. "What a pity," said a lady near me to a gentleman that was by her side, "that a prince of the royal blood of Africa should have to go upon the stage for a living! It is indeed a shame!" When he came to the scene,

> "O, cursed, cursed slave! — whip me, ye devils,
> From the possession of this heavenly sight!
> Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur!
> Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
> O, Desdemona! Desdemona! dead?
> Dead? O! O! O!"[47]

the effect was indeed grand. When the curtain fell, the prince was called upon the stage, where he was received with deafening shouts of approbation, and a number of *bouquets* thrown at his feet, which he picked up, bowed, and retired. I went into Cheapside the next morning, at an early hour, to see if the prince had given up his old trade for what I supposed to be a more lucrative one; but I found the hero of the previous night at his post, and giving out his bills as energetically as when I had last seen him. Having to go to the provinces for some months, I lost sight of Mr. Jenkins, and on my return to town did not trouble myself to look him up. More than a year after I had witnessed the representation of Othello at the Eagle, I was walking, one pleasant Sabbath evening, through one of the small streets in the borough, when I found myself in front of a little chapel, where a number of persons were going in. As I was passing on slowly, an elderly man said to me, "I suppose you have come to hear your colored brother preach." "No," I answered; "I was not aware that one was to be here." "Yes," said he; "and a clever man he is, too." As the old man offered to find me a seat, I concluded to go in and hear this son of Africa. The room, which was not large, was already full. I had to wait but a short time before the reverend gentleman made

47. Slightly misquoted from *Othello*, 5.2.276–82.

his appearance. He was nearly black, and dressed in a black suit, with high shirt-collar, and an intellectual-looking cravat, that nearly hid his chin. A pair of spectacles covered his eyes. The preacher commenced by reading a portion of Scripture; and then announced that they would sing the twenty-eighth hymn in "the arrangement." O, that voice! I felt sure that I had heard that musical voice before; but where, I could not tell. I was not aware that any of my countrymen were in London; but felt that, whoever he was, he was no discredit to the race; for he was a most eloquent and accomplished orator. His sermon was against the sale and use of intoxicating drinks, and the bad habits of the working classes, of whom his audience was composed.

Although the subject was intensely interesting, I was impatient for it to come to a close, for I wanted to speak to the preacher. But, the evening being warm, and the room heated, the reverend gentleman, on wiping the perspiration from his face (which, by the way, ran very freely), took off his spectacles on one occasion, so that I immediately recognized him, and saved me from going up to the pulpit at the end of the service. Yes; it was the bill-distributor of Cheapside, the crossing-sweeper of Chelsea, the tract-seller and psalm-singer of Kensington, and the Othello of the Eagle Saloon. I could scarcely keep from laughing right out when I discovered this to be the man that I had seen in so many characters. As I was about leaving my seat at the close of the services, the old man who showed me into the chapel asked me if I would not like to be introduced to the minister, and I immediately replied that I would. We proceeded up the aisle, and met the clergyman as he was descending. On seeing me, he did not wait for a formal introduction, but put out his hand and said, "I have seen you so often, sir, that I seem to know you." "Yes," I replied; "we have met several times, and under different circumstances." Without saying more, he invited me to walk with him towards his home, which was in the direction of my own residence. We proceeded; and, during the walk, Mr. Jenkins gave me some little account of his early history. "You think me rather an odd fish, I presume," said he. "Yes," I replied. "You are not the only one who thinks so," continued he. "Although I am not as black as some of my countrymen, I am a native of Africa. Surrounded

by some beautiful mountain scenery, and situated between Darfour and Abyssinia, two thousand miles in the interior of Africa, is a small valley going by the name of Tegla.[48] To that valley I stretch forth my affections, giving it the endearing appellation of my native home and fatherland. It was there that I was born, it was there that I received the fond looks of a loving mother, and it was there that I set my feet, for the first time, upon a world full of cares, trials, difficulties and dangers. My father being a farmer, I used to be sent out to take care of his goats. This service I did when I was between seven and eight years of age. As I was the eldest of the boys, my pride was raised in no small degree when I beheld my father preparing a farm for me. This event filled my mind with the grand anticipation of leaving the care of the goats to my brother, who was then beginning to work a little. While my father was making these preparations, I had the constant charge of the goats; and, being accompanied by two other boys, who resided near my father's house, we wandered many miles from home, by which means we acquired a knowledge of the different districts of our country.

"It was while in these rambles with my companions that I became the victim of the slave-trader. We were tied with cords, and taken to Tegla, and thence to Kordofan, which is under the jurisdiction of the Pacha of Egypt.[49] From Kordofan I was brought down to Dongola and Korti, in Nubia, and from thence down the Nile to Cairo; and, after being sold nine times, I became the property of an English gentleman, who brought me to this country and put me into school.[50] But he died before I finished my education, and his family feeling no interest in me, I had to seek a living as best I could. I have been employed for some years in distributing hand-bills for a barber in Cheapside in the morning, go to Chelsea and sweep a crossing in the afternoon, and sing psalms and sell religious

48. Darfur is a western province of Somalia, bordering contemporary Chad. Abyssinia, the historic name of contemporary Ethiopia, shares a border on its west with Sudan.

49. A pasha (the more common spelling) was a person of high military rank or a provincial governor in Ottoman-controlled lands, which included Egypt in the nineteenth century.

50. Nubia, in early recorded times an independent kingdom, lies along the Nile River between northern Sudan and southern Egypt.

tracts in the evening. Sometimes I have an engagement to perform at some of the small theatres, as I had when you saw me at the Eagle. I preach for this little congregation over here, and charge them nothing; for I want that the poor should have the Gospel without money and without price. I have now given up distributing bills; I have settled my son in that office. My eldest daughter was married about three months ago; and I have presented her husband with the Chelsea crossing, as my daughter's wedding portion."[51] "Can he make a living at it?" I eagerly inquired. "O, yes! that crossing at Chelsea is worth thirty shillings a week, if it is well swept," said he. "But what do you do for a living for yourself?" I asked. "I am the leader of a band"; he continued; "and we play for balls and parties, and three times a week at the Holborn Casino."

By this time we had reached a point where we had to part; and I left Joseph Jenkins, impressed with the idea that he was the greatest genius that I had met in Europe.[52]

Chapter 32

[Return Crossing to America]

His freedom purchased, Brown lost no time in returning home to resume his role in the battle against slavery, which had intensified during his absence. On his inbound voyage he had bad meteorological luck, traveling for long stretches through heavy rain and high seas. The difficult conditions tested the fortitude of the emigrant masses of future Americans, from whom Brown was conspicuously removed. Brown, by contrast, seemed more concerned about the future than about present discomforts. Resolute on shipboard about his future, he stepped onto American soil ready to recommence the main fight of his adult life. He was returning home, he

51. Street corner crossings in London were often tended by people of African origin. Contemporaries would have been familiar with the character of the one-legged black crossing sweeper Billy Waters in Pierce Egan's popular book of London street life sketches, *Life in London* (1821).

52. Brown's regard for Jenkins, whether real or invented, outlasted his residence in England. He reprinted this sketch nearly verbatim in *The Black Man* (1863), in which Jenkins was one of only several people with no discernible connection to North America.

clearly believed, a transformed man, the beneficiary of admission into the great public buildings and leading homes of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France. Friends who met him upon his arrival in Philadelphia agreed: the William Wells Brown they observed was a worldlier, more finished man than the one they had last seen five years before.

One act indicative of his reimmersion in the antislavery movement was his composition of this new concluding chapter, which he wrote within weeks of his return, for the planned American edition of the work. He then speedily arranged for publication of the American edition with John P. Jewett of Boston, who had brought out *Uncle Tom's Cabin* three years before and was the foremost antislavery publisher in the United States.

> "— when I left the shore,
> The distant shore, which gave me birth,
> I hardly thought to grieve once more,
> To quit another spot on earth."[53]
>
> BYRON

What a change five years make in one's history! The summer of 1849 found me a stranger in a foreign land, unknown to its inhabitants; its laws, customs and history, were a blank to me.[54] But how different the summer of 1854! During my sojourn I had travelled over nearly every railroad in England and Scotland, and had visited Ireland and Wales, besides spending some weeks on the continent. I had become so well acquainted with the British people and their history, that I had begun to fancy myself an Englishman by habit, if not by birth. The treatment which I had experienced at their hands had endeared them to me, and caused me to feel myself at home wherever I went. Under such circumstances, it was not strange that I commenced with palpitating heart the preparation to return to my *native land.* Native land! How harshly that word sounds to my ears! True, America was the land of my birth; my

53. From "To Florence," by Byron.

54. Brown is associating his foreign status in England with that of Moses in Egypt by citing Moses's self-description as a "stranger in a strange land" (Exodus 2:22).

grandfather had taken part in her Revolution, had enriched the soil with his blood, yet upon this soil I had been worked as a slave. I seem still to hear the sound of the auctioneer's rough voice, as I stood on the block in the slave-market at St. Louis. I shall never forget the savage grin with which he welcomed a higher bid, when he thought that he had received the last offer. I had seen a mother sold and taken to the cotton-fields of the far South; three brothers had been bartered to the soul-driver in my presence; a dear sister had been sold to the negro-dealer, and driven away by him; I had seen the rusty chains fastened upon her delicate wrists; the whip had been applied to my own person, and the marks of the brutal driver's lash were still on my body. Yet this was my native land, and to this land was I about to embark.

In Edinburgh, I had become acquainted with the Wighams; in Glasgow, the Patons and Smeals; in Manchester, the Langdons; in Newcastle, the Mawsons and Richardsons.[55] To Miss Ellen Richardson, of this place, I was mainly indebted for the redemption of my body from slavery and the privilege of again returning to my native country.[56] I had also met, and become acquainted with, John Bishop Estlin, Esq., of Bristol, and his kindhearted and accomplished daughter.[57] Of the hundreds of British Abolitionists with whom I had the pleasure of shaking hands while abroad, I know of none whose hearts beat more fervently for the emancipation of the American slave than Mr. Estlin's. He is indeed a model Christian. His house, his heart and his purse, were always open to the needy, without any regard to sect, color or country. When those distinguished fugitive slaves, William and Ellen Craft, arrived in England, unknown and with-

55. The various families he mentions were all important participants in the British antislavery movement and, as such, crucial associates for Brown during his residence in Britain.

56. It was Brown's English friend Richardson who offered to take on the obligation of purchasing his freedom from the steamboat captain Enoch Price after Brown raised a moral objection to doing so himself. Brown did not interfere when she made the offer in 1854; acting through representatives, she negotiated and came to terms with Price, allowing Brown to return to the United States shortly thereafter a free man.

57. The English ophthalmologist John Bishop Estlin (1785–1855) and his daughter Mary Ann were warm friends to Brown and ardent allies of the American antislavery movement.

out friends, Mr. Estlin wrote to me and said, "If the Crafts are in want, send to me. If you cannot find a home for them, let them come to Bristol, and I will keep them, at my expense, until something better turns up."[58] And nobly did he keep his word. He put the two fugitives in school, and saw that they did not want for the means of support. I have known him to keep concealed what he had given to benevolent objects. To Mr. Estlin I am indebted for many acts of kindness; and now that the broad Atlantic lies between us, and in all probability we shall never again meet on earth, it is with heartfelt gratitude and pleasure that I make this mention of him.

And last, though not the least, I had become intimate with that most generous-hearted philanthropist, George Thompson, who never feels so well as when giving a welcome to an American fugitive slave.[59] I had spent hours at the hospitable firesides of Harriet Martineau, R. D. Webb, and other distinguished authors.[60] You will not, reader, think it strange that my heart became sad at the thought of leaving all these dear friends,

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58. The married couple William (ca. 1824–1900) and Ellen (1826–91) Craft were close friends and allies of Brown's. Brown met them within days of the amazing escape from slavery that became the subject of their *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), one of the most remarkable of the fugitive slave narratives. Brown subsequently helped them to find employment in the North and on various occasions shared a lecture platform with them. He was reunited with them in England in 1851, to which they too had fled for fear for their safety after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. The Crafts did not return to the United States until 1869.

59. George Thompson (1804–78), orator, member of Parliament, and reformer, was one of the leading figures in the British antislavery movement. An important ally of William Lloyd Garrison's, Thompson was by extension also one of Brown's most trusted contacts in the movement in England.

60. Brown (accompanied by Ellen and William Craft) paid a long visit to Harriet Martineau (1802–76) in her Lake Windermere home. Brown revered Martineau, whose reputation as a progressive author, journalist, sociologist, and antislavery activist was transatlantic. His account of the tour of the Lake District that he and the Crafts made in her company is the subject of chapter 16 of *The American Fugitive*.

Richard Davis Webb (1805–72) was an antislavery printer-publisher based in Dublin. An important ally of William Lloyd Garrison's, Webb offered his local services to a number of Garrison's friends passing through Ireland. He helped to set up a schedule of speaking engagements for Brown directly after his arrival in the British Isles in 1849, as Webb had for Frederick Douglass shortly after his arrival in 1845.

to return to a country in which I had spent some of the best days of my life as a slave, and where I knew that prejudice would greet me on my arrival.

Most of the time I had resided in London. Its streets, parks, public buildings and its fog, had become "as familiar as household words." I had heard the deep, bass voice of the Bishop of London, in St. Paul's Cathedral.[61] I had sat in Westminster Abbey, until I had lost all interest in the services, and then wandered about amongst the monuments, reading the epitaphs placed over the dead.[62] Like others, I had been locked in the Temple Church, and compelled to wait till service was over, whether I liked it or not.[63] I had spent days in the British Museum and National Gallery, and in all these I had been treated as a man.[64] The "negro pew," which I had seen in the churches of America, was not to be found in the churches of London. There, too, were my daughters. They who had been denied education upon equal terms with children of a fairer complexion, in the United States, had been received in the London schools upon terms of perfect equality. They had accompanied me to most of the noted places in the metropolis. We had strolled through Regent-street, the Strand, Piccadilly and Oxford-street, so often, that sorrow came over

61. St. Paul's Cathedral, designed and rebuilt by Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of 1666, has been a London landmark since its completion in 1711 and has served as the burial site of some of the nation's most revered figures, including the poet John Donne, Lord Horatio Nelson, the Duke of Wellington, and Wren himself.

62. Westminster Abbey was and is the most storied church in England. A mainly gothic structure that evolved from its original shape and purpose as a tenth-century Norman monastery, it has grown in stages into one of London's most impressive edifices. It has hosted nearly every English coronation since William the Conqueror and now famously houses the remains of many of the country's greatest political, military, and cultural figures.

63. Temple Church, though less hallowed than St. Paul's or Westminster, was and is one of London's most historic and beautiful places of worship, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

64. The British Museum, then in the process of rapid expansion, housed the national library as well as one of the greatest collections of antiquities in existence. The National Gallery was established in 1824 and moved to its present location in Trafalgar Square in 1838. During Brown's period of residence in London, its collections were impressive but narrow for a national collection.

me as the thought occurred to me that I should never behold them again.[65]

Then the English manner of calling on friends before one's departure. I can meet an enemy with pleasure, but it is with regret that I part with a friend. As the time for me to leave drew near, I felt more clearly my identity with the English people. By and by the last hour arrived that I was to spend in London. The cab stood at the door, with my trunks on its top; and, bidding the household "good-by," I entered the vehicle, the driver raised his whip, and I looked for the last time on my old home in Cecil-street. As we turned into the Strand, Nelson's monument, in Trafalgar-square, greeted me on the left, and Somerset House on the right.[66] I took a farewell look at Covent Garden Market, through whose walks I had often passed, and where I had spent many pleasant hours.[67] My youngest daughter was in France, but the eldest met me at the depôt, and after a few moments the bell rang, and away we went.

As the train was leaving the great metropolis of the world behind, I caught a last view of the dome of St. Paul's, and the old pile of Westminster Abbey.

In every town through which we passed on our way to Liverpool I could call to mind the name of some one whose acquaintance I had made, and whose hospitality I had shared. The steamer City of Manchester had her fires kindled when we arrived, and we went immediately on board.[68]

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65. Regent, the Strand, Piccadilly, and Oxford were some of the major thoroughfares of Victorian London.

66. Nelson's Column, rising 185 feet and surmounted by a seventeen-foot statue of Lord Horatio Nelson, was already one of the landmarks of central London. Overlooking Trafalgar Square, it was built in commemoration of Nelson's great naval victory in 1805 over the French fleet, during which he was killed.

The Somerset House, of late-eighteenth-century construction, was one of London's most magnificent buildings. In Brown's day it housed the Royal Society; today it houses the Courtauld Institute of Art.

67. For three centuries Covent Garden had been the largest fruit and vegetable market in London.

68. Commissioned in 1851, the *City of Manchester* was making one of its last transatlantic runs between Liverpool and Philadelphia. Its owner, the Inman Line, would soon reassign all its steamers to service in the Crimean War.

We found one hundred and seventy-five passengers in the cabin, and above five hundred in the steerage.[69] After some delay, the ship weighed anchor, the machinery was put in motion, and, bidding Liverpool a long farewell, the vessel moved down the Mersey, and was in a short time out at sea. The steam tender accompanied the ship about thirty miles, during which time search was made throughout the Manchester to see that no "stow-aways" were on board. No vessel ever leaves an English port without some one trying to get his passage out without pay. When the crew are at work, or not on the watch, these persons come on board, hide themselves under the berths in the steerage cabin, or amongst the freight, until the vessel is out to sea, and then they come out. As they are always poor persons, without either baggage or money, they succeed in getting their passage without giving anything in return. As the tender was about quitting us to return to Liverpool, it came along-side to take on board those who had come with the vessel to see their friends off. Any number of white napkins were called into requisition, as friends were shaking hands with each other, and renewing their promises to write by the first post. One young man had come out to spend a few more hours with a handsome Scotch lass, with whom he, no doubt, had a matrimonial engagement. Another, an English lady, seemed much affected when the last bell of the tender rung, and the captain cried "All on board." Having no one to look after, I found time to survey others. The tender let go her cables amid three hearty cheers, and a deafening salute from the two-pounder on board the City of Manchester. A moment more, and the two steamers were leaving each other with rapid speed. The two young ladies of whom I have already made mention, together with many others, had their faces buried in their handkerchiefs, and appeared to be dying with grief. However, all of them seemed to get over it very soon. On the second day out at sea I saw the young English lady walking the quarter-deck with a fine-looking gentleman, and holding as tightly to his arm as if she had left no one behind; and as for the Scotch lass, she was seated

69. Westbound ships typically carried large numbers of steerage passengers during these years of heavy emigration to the United States.

on a settee with a countryman of hers, who had made her acquaintance on board, and, from all appearance, had entirely forgotten her first love. Such is the waywardness of man and woman, and the unfaithfulness of the human heart.

In the latter part of the second day a storm overtook us, and for the ten succeeding days we scarcely knew whether we were on our heads or our heels. The severest part of the gale was on the eighth and ninth nights out. On one of those evenings a fellow-roommate came in and said, "If you wish to see a little fun, go into the forward steerage." It was about eight o'clock, and most of the passengers were either in bed, or preparing for the night's rest, such as is to be had on board a ship in a gale of wind. This cabin contained about two hundred and fifty persons; some Germans, some Irish, and twenty-five or thirty Gypsies. Forty or fifty of these were on their knees in their berths, engaged in prayer. No camp-meeting ever presented a more noisy spectacle than did this cabin. The ship was rolling, and the sea running mountains high, and many of these passengers had given up all hope of ever seeing land again. The Gypsies were foremost amongst those who were praying; indeed, they seemed to fancy themselves in a camp-meeting, for many of them shouted at the top of their voices.[70] One of them, known as the "Queen of the Gypsies," came to me and said, "O, Master! do get down and help us to ask God to stop the wind! You are a black man; may be he'll pay more attention to what you say. Now do, master, do! and when the storm is over I will tell your fortune for nothing." At this juncture one of the chests which had been fastened to the floor broke away from its moorings, and came sliding across the cabin at the rate of about twenty miles per hour; soon another got loose, and these two locomotives broke up the prayer-meeting. Trunk after trunk became unfastened, until some eight

70. Gypsies (today more accurately and correctly called Roma) are an ethnic people who migrated westward from their likely point of origin in India and settled across large portions of Europe during the past half-millennium. A diasporic people with distinct customs and practices but no homeland, Roma were (and in some places still are) one of the most persecuted minorities in Europe.

or ten were crossing the cabin every time the vessel went over. At last the loose boxes upset the tables, on which were some of the passengers' eatables, and in a short time the whole cabin was in splendid confusion. The lamps, one after another, were knocked down and extinguished, so that the cabin was in total darkness. As I turned to retrace my steps, I heard the company joining in the prayer, and I was informed the next day that it was kept up during most of the night.

With all the watchfulness on the day of sailing, several persons succeeded in stowing themselves away. First one came out, and then another, until not less than five made their appearance on deck. As fast as these men were discovered they were put to work; so that labor, if not money, might be obtained for their passage. On the sixth day out I missed a small leather trunk, and search was immediately made in every direction, but no tidings of it could be found. However, after its being lost two days, I offered a reward for its recovery, and it was soon found, hid away in the forecastle. It had been broken open, and a few things, together with a little money, had been taken. The ships Chieftain and Harmony were the only vessels we met during the first ten days. An iceberg made its appearance while we were on the banks, but it was some distance to the larboard.

After a long passage of twenty days we arrived at the mouth of the Delaware, and took a pilot on board. The passengers were now all life; the Irish were basking in the sun, the Germans were singing, and the Gypsies were dancing. Some fifteen miles below Philadelphia, the officers came on board, to see that no sickness was on the vessel; and, after being passed by the doctors, each person began to get his luggage on deck, and prepare to go on shore. About four o'clock, on the twenty-sixth day of September, 1854, the City of Manchester hauled alongside the Philadelphia wharf, and the passengers all on the move; the Scotch lass clinging to the arm of her new Highland laddie, and the young English lady in company with her "fresh" lover. It is a dangerous thing to allow the Atlantic Ocean to separate one from his or her "affectionate friend." The City of Manchester, though not a fast steamer, is, nevertheless, a safe one. Her officers are men of experience and activity. Captain Wyly was

always at his post; the first officer was an able seaman, and Mr. John Mirehouse, the second officer, was a most gentlemanly and obliging, as well as experienced officer. To this gentleman I am much indebted for kind attention shown me on the voyage. I had met him on a former occasion at Whitehaven.[71] He is a stanch friend of humanity.

At Philadelphia I met with a most cordial reception at the hands of the Motts, J. M. M'Kim, the Stills, the Fortens, and that distinguished gentleman and friend of the slave, Robert Purvis, Esq.[72] There is no colored man in this country to whom the Anti-slavery cause is more indebted than to Mr. Purvis. Endowed with a capacious and reflective mind, he is ever in search after truth; and, consequently, all reforms find in him an able and devoted advocate. Inheriting a large fortune, he has had the means, as well as the will, to do good. Few men in this country, either colored or white, possess the rare accomplishments of Robert Purvis. In no city in the Free States does the Anti-slavery movement have more bitter opponents than in Philadelphia. Close to two of our Southern States, and connected as it is in a commercial point of view, it could scarcely be

71. Whitehaven was an important nineteenth-century port and coal-mining center located on England's west coast near the Lake District.

72. Brown had many friends in the white and black antislavery community of Philadelphia, a city notorious, as he later states, for its proslavery sympathies. He lists some of them. Lucretia Coffin Mott (1793–1880) was a major presence in both the women's rights (she presided over the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention) and antislavery movements out of her home base in Philadelphia, and her husband, James Mott (1788–1868), was likewise active, if less prominently, in these movements. James Miller McKim (1810–74) was an ordained Presbyterian minister, long-serving corresponding secretary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and ally of William Lloyd Garrison's. William Still (1821–1902) and his wife, Letitia, were dear friends of Brown's and central figures on the Philadelphia station of the Underground Railroad, about which William Still wrote the now-classic early history (*The Underground Rail Road*, 1872). The Fortens were one of Philadelphia's most distinguished African American families. James Forten (1766–1842) was a successful local businessman and early antislavery activist. His son Robert Bridges Forten (1813–64) was a leader in the city's antislavery organizations. Robert Purvis (1810–98), born in Charleston, South Carolina, of mixed racial background, moved to Philadelphia in childhood and in 1831 married James Forten's daughter Harriet (1810–75). Purvis was one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and for decades played a leading role both locally and nationally in the fight for equal rights.

otherwise. Colorphobia is more rampant there than in the pro-slavery, negro-hating city of New York. I was not destined to escape this unnatural and anti-christian prejudice. While walking through Chestnut-street, in company with two of my fellow-passengers, we hailed an omnibus going in the direction which we wished to go. It immediately stopped, and the white men were furnished with seats, but I was told that "We don't allow niggers to ride in here." It so happened that these two persons had rode in the same car with me from London to Liverpool. We had put up at the same hotel at the latter place, and had crossed the Atlantic in the same steamer. But as soon as we touch the soil of America we can no longer ride in the same conveyance, no longer eat at the same table, or be regarded with equal justice, by our thin-skinned democracy. During five years' residence in monarchical Europe I had enjoyed the rights allowed to all foreigners in the countries through which I passed; but on returning to my NATIVE LAND the influence of slavery meets me the first day that I am in the country. Had I been an escaped felon, like John Mitchell, no one would have questioned my right to a seat in a Philadelphia omnibus.[73] Neither of the foreigners who were allowed to ride in this carriage had ever visited our country before. The constitution of these United States was as a blank to them; the Declaration of Independence, in all probability, they had never seen,—much less, read. But what mattered it? They were white, and that was enough. The fact of my being an American by birth could not be denied; that I had read and understood the constitution and laws, the most pro-slavery, negro-hating professor of Christianity would admit; but I was colored, and that was enough. I had partaken of the hospitality of noblemen in England, had sat at the table of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs; I had looked from the strangers' gallery down upon the great legislators of England, as they

73. John Mitchel (1815–75) was a radical Irish journalist jailed by the British for sedition. He escaped from a penal colony to the United States in 1853 and promptly resumed journalistic agitation against British rule from his new home in New York City. His other main cause, to which he was devoted with equal passion, was the defense of slavery, the reason for Brown's disdain.

sat in the House of Commons; I had stood in the House of Lords, when Her Britannic Majesty prorogued her Parliament[74]; I had eaten at the same table with Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Charles Dickens, Eliza Cook, Alfred Tennyson, and the son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott[75]; the omnibuses of Paris, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Liverpool, had stopped to take me up; I had often entered the "Caledonia," "Bayswater," "Hammersmith," "Chelsea," "Bluebell," and other omnibuses that rattle over the pavements, of Regent-street, Cheapside, and the west end of London,—but what mattered that? My face was not white, my hair was not straight; and, therefore, I must be excluded from a seat in a third-rate American omnibus. Slavery demanded that it should be so. I charge this prejudice to the pro-slavery pulpits of our land, which first set the example of proscription by erecting in their churches the "negro pew." I charge it to that hypocritical profession of democracy which will welcome fugitives from other countries, and drive its own into exile. I charge it to the recreant sons of the men who carried on the American revolutionary war, and who come together every fourth of July to boast of what their fathers did, while they, their sons, have become associated with bloodhounds, to be put at any moment on the track of the fugitive slave.

But I had returned to the country for the express purpose of joining in the glorious battle against slavery, of which this Negrophobia is a legitimate offspring. And why not meet it in its stronghold? I might have remained in a country where my manhood was never denied; I might

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74. That is, Queen Victoria (1819–1901), the longest-serving monarch of England and the person after whom the era took its name.

75. Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–73) was a prolific English novelist and dramatist, as well as occasional member of Parliament. His works earned greater popularity in their day than critical acclaim.

Charles Dickens (1812–70) was the preeminent fiction writer of Victorian England and remains one of the world's most beloved novelists.

Eliza Cook (1818–89) was a popular English poet of working-class background and proprietor of the penny weekly *Eliza Cook's Journal*.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), prolific novelist and poet, was one of Scotland's most beloved writers. His son-in-law and biographer, John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854), was the author of the popular and well-regarded *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837–38).

have remained in ease in other climes; but what was ease and comfort abroad, while more than three millions of my countrymen were groaning in the prison-house of slavery in the Southern States? Yes, I came back to the land of my nativity, not to be a spectator, but a soldier — a soldier in this moral warfare against the most cruel system of oppression that ever blackened the character or hardened the heart of man. And the smiles of my old associates, and the approval of my course while abroad by my colored fellow-citizens, has amply compensated me for the twenty days' rough passage on my return.

CHAPTER FOUR

Writing African American Fiction

Brown was living safely in England beyond the reach of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act when he wrote and published *Clotel*. The earliest-known African American novel to appear in print, *Clotel* has the additional distinction of offering one of its era's most searing critiques of American social, religious, and economic practices. Its impact on the contemporaneous American reading public, though, was minimal, since it went unpublished in the United States in the nineteenth century and only a minuscule number of copies from the London edition reached North American shores. That situation has changed dramatically since the late 1960s, since which *Clotel* has been issued in multiple formats — in trade paperbacks, student editions, inexpensive reprints, anthologies of American literature, online texts — and become canonized as a classic American novel. If so, it is a classic of a curiously hodgepodge sort: one part fiction, one part fugitive slave narrative, and one part polemic.

Brown took the subject of the novel, the lives of the illegitimate, mixed-race slave daughters and granddaughters of Thomas Jefferson, from rumors widely disseminated in his day. Such rumors had begun flying around Virginia as early as 1802, when President Jefferson spurned the reappointment of James Callendar as postmaster of Richmond and Callendar took his revenge by smearing Jefferson's reputation as a paragon of Southern manhood and racial purity in the *Richmond Recorder*. Those charges circulated in the press and through word of mouth for decades. By Brown's day they had become a standard subject of antislavery lecturers, who routinely impugned Jefferson as the most objectionable of the Founders for failing to live up to his parentage of the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

In 1848 Brown joined the outcry against Jefferson's hypocrisy by including a song called "Jefferson's Daughter" in his compilation of antislavery songs (*The Anti-Slavery Harp*).

What distinguishes Brown's reaction to the Jefferson legend is the degree to which he seems to have internalized the charge. Like the novel's characters Clotel and Althesa, Brown was the unacknowledged child of a white father who had permitted his child's descent into slavery. Furthermore, in his various male roles as son, brother, and father, Brown repeatedly demonstrated a particular solicitude for the vulnerability of black girls and women in the workings of Southern society. In portraying the travails visited on black men, women, and children by white paternal betrayal, Brown wrote from his viscera. Incorporation of the Jefferson rumors into a narrative about the dehumanizing reality of slavery was therefore a fictional challenge he was well prepared personally, psychologically, and ideologically to undertake.

One can easily exaggerate, however, the importance of the Jefferson story in motivating Brown to write this novel or in influencing its contents. The Jeffersonian legacy is only fitfully present in the first edition of the novel and absent in its later versions. In actuality Brown had equally compelling sources for the narrative in his own experience and in that of his peers. He had already proved himself a gifted compiler of antislavery songs, and he demonstrated a similar capacity to store numerous fugitive slave tales in his head. He makes in the novel's concluding chapter a revealing characterization of his authorial role in calling himself the "depository" of the tales of dozens of fugitive slaves he had helped transport to freedom in Canada in the 1840s. By the 1850s such stories were circulating widely through the culture. Brown had read Theodore Weld's compendium of fugitive slave tales, *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839), and Brown knew at firsthand many of the comparable tales Benjamin Drew would soon assemble in *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or, the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (1856). In this context *Clotel* should be understood as no less the distillation of all those narratives than simply the tale of two generations of Jefferson's supposed offspring transported on a slave odyssey across the Southern states. This is a significant point because the true object of Brown's ire is in any case not Jefferson but his legacy,

which Brown sees manifested in the behavior of all aiders and abettors of the institution of slavery.

The institution, of course, had legions of opponents and defenders by the 1850s, as slavery emerged as the central and most divisive issue in U.S. political life. A signal event at the time that Brown wrote *Clotel* was the publication in Boston of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the decade's runaway best seller in both the United States and Great Britain and a generator of enormous controversy. Brown read the novel in England soon after publication and also attended public events in England and Scotland held to demonstrate support for Stowe and her novel. The most notable was the packed gathering on May 16, 1853, at London's Exeter Hall, with Stowe present, that Brown described for the American public in a letter he sent back home for publication in the *Liberator*.[1]

Brown followed closely the war of words that raged in the U.S. press about Stowe's novel. As he would have immediately recognized, the attacks on Stowe's character and on her novel's authenticity were comparable in important ways to the accusations routinely made about fugitive slave narrators and narratives. They were expressed with such vituperation that Stowe felt compelled during 1852–53 to compile a documentary defense, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon Which the Story Is Founded, Together With Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work* (1853). Over the same period Brown was busily composing his own novel, which can be understood as merging elements of both of Stowe's volumes: a fictional account of life in slavery and a presentation of the work's sources. Brown drew no less heavily than Stowe on fugitive slave narratives and oral lore, but he also borrowed from a remarkably wide array of additional sources: journalism, travelogues, novels, law codes, hymnals, the Bible, sermons, songs, advertisements, tall tales — and, as always, from his own experience.

The result is one of the richest compendiums of American materials of

1. Brown wrote his letter the morning after the event; see *Liberator* 22 (June 3, 1853): 97. London's Exeter Hall was a favorite assembly place of British abolitionists. Brown frequently attended and sometimes addressed antislavery meetings there.

the 1850s, the decade that saw the publication of such treasure troves of Americana as *Moby-Dick* (1852) and *Leaves of Grass* (1855). To tell his story about Clotel and the other members of her family facing the consequences of dispersal across the United States, Brown constructed an episodic plot into which he wove a series of panoramic vignettes of American life that included slave auctions, steamboat and railroad scenes, Negro pens and prisons, plantations, Southern cities, domestic situations, outdoor worship, and stagecoach rides. To complement its social and geographic richness, Brown used as wide a variety of forms of American English as can be found in virtually any novel of its time. The result is one of the fullest, if messiest, explorations of the life and language — and life in language — of antebellum America. The selections that follow are prime examples of Brown's fictional rendering of the exteriors and interiors of antebellum America.

Brown wrote the novel in London, but precious little else is known about the process of its composition or its terms of publication. The chapter numbers and titles are Brown's.

SELECTIONS FROM

Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States

Chapter 1

The Negro Sale

This opening chapter of the novel presents a tableau of a slave auction, a scene designed to open the eyes of the public to the horrors of the "peculiar institution." The novel's controversial subject matter, contentious tone, and rhetorical style place its readers in a position approximating that of a contemporaneous audience attending an abolitionist lecture or a jury hearing a legal case. Accordingly, the voice of the narrator resembles that of an antislavery speaker or a prosecuting attorney arguing his position in public with the intention of swaying the hearts and minds of his listeners.

Brown was well aware from his experience on the lecture circuit of the importance of rhetorical presentation. He was careful therefore to set the terms of his novel even before introducing his players and setting. By the time he raises the curtain on Clotel and her family as they ascend the auction block, he has already foregrounded for his readers a salient fact of slavery in the United States: the gap between the ideology of racial purity and the reality of miscegenation.

> "Why stands she near the auction stand,
> That girl so young and fair?
> What brings her to this dismal place,
> Why stands she weeping there?"[1]

With the growing population of slaves in the Southern States of America, there is a fearful increase of half whites, most of whose fathers are slaveowners, and their mothers slaves. Society does not frown upon the

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The text comes from the novel's original edition: *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853).

1. From "The Slave Auction—A Fact," a song Brown included in *The Anti-Slavery Harp.*

man who sits with his mulatto child upon his knee, whilst its mother stands a slave behind his chair. The late Henry Clay, some years since, predicted that the abolition of negro slavery would be brought about by the amalgamation of the races.[2] John Randolph, a distinguished slaveholder of Virginia, and a prominent statesman, said in a speech in the legislature of his native state, that "the blood of the first American statesmen coursed through the veins of the slave of the South."[3] In all the cities and towns of the slave states, the real negro, or clear black, does not amount to more than one in every four of the slave population.[4] This fact is, of itself, the best evidence of the degraded and immoral condition of the relation of master and slave in the United States of America.

In all the slave states, the law says:—"Slaves shall be deemed, sold, taken, reputed, and adjudged in law to be chattels personal in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators and assigns, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever. A slave is one who is in the power of a master to whom he belongs. The master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, and his labour. He can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire anything, but what must belong to his master. The slave is entirely subject to the will of his master, who

2. Clay had recently died. Brown felt a particular animosity toward his fellow Kentuckian, one of the most influential politicians of his era. Clay (1771–1852) held a variety of senior governmental positions, including U.S. representative, senator, and secretary of state, and held reputedly moderate views on race and slavery. These included reverence for racial purity and support for African colonization, positions that Brown found repulsive.

3. John Randolph (1783–1833), slaveholding orator, U.S. representative, and U.S. senator, was a descendant of one of the first families of Virginia (FFVs, as they were proudly or contemptuously called by their supporters and detractors). A man of aristocratic bearing and strong views, he contested many pieties of his society, finally breaking with his own earlier views on slavery by emancipating his slaves in his will. Both he and Clay expressed extreme fears of miscegenation, which they saw as vitiating their ideal of a society based on racial purity.

Statements such as that quoted in the text persisted throughout the nineteenth century. Mark Twain based the plot of his subversive tale of racial confusion in antebellum Missouri, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), on precisely this version of miscegenation.

4. Brown is reiterating an observation about the changing complexion of slaves made by numerous antebellum visitors to the South.

may correct and chastise him, though not with unusual rigour, or so as to maim and mutilate him, or expose him to the danger of loss of life, or to cause his death. The slave, to remain a slave, must be sensible that there is no appeal from his master."[5] Where the slave is placed by law entirely under the control of the man who claims him, body and soul, as property, what else could be expected than the most depraved social condition? The marriage relation, the oldest and most sacred institution given to man by his Creator, is unknown and unrecognised in the slave laws of the United States. Would that we could say, that the moral and religious teaching in the slave states were better than the laws; but, alas! we cannot. A few years since, some slaveholders became a little uneasy in their minds about the rightfulness of permitting slaves to take to themselves husbands and wives, while they still had others living, and applied to their religious teachers for advice; and the following will show how this grave and important subject was treated:—

"Is a servant, whose husband or wife has been sold by his or her master into a distant country, to be permitted to marry again?"

The query was referred to a committee, who made the following report; which, after discussion, was adopted:—

"That, in view of the circumstances in which servants in this country are placed, the committee are unanimous in the opinion, that it is better to permit servants thus circumstanced to take another husband or wife."

Such was the answer from a committee of the "Shiloh Baptist Association"; and instead of receiving light, those who asked the question were plunged into deeper darkness!

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5. Brown's mélange of terms and clauses defining the status of slaves is drawn from the legal codes of various Southern states, which effectively defined the slaves as nonagents. Publication of such codes, which became increasingly common in the antebellum period, had the dual purpose of formalizing slave status internally and combating the efforts of antislavery proponents externally.

A similar question was put to the "Savannah River Association," and the answer, as the following will show, did not materially differ from the one we have already given:-

"Whether, in a case of involuntary separation, of such a character as to preclude all prospect of future intercourse, the parties ought to be allowed to marry again."

Answer —

"That such separation among persons situated as our slaves are, is civilly a separation by death; and they believe that, in the sight of God, it would be so viewed. To forbid second marriages in such cases would be to expose the parties, not only to stronger hardships and strong temptation, but to church-censure for acting in obedience to their masters, who cannot be expected to acquiesce in a regulation at variance with justice to the slaves, and to the spirit of that command which regulates marriage among Christians. The slaves are not free agents; and a dissolution by death is not more entirely without their consent, and beyond their control, than by such separation."

Although marriage, as the above indicates, is a matter which the slaveholders do not think is of any importance, or of any binding force with their slaves; yet it would be doing that degraded class an injustice, not to acknowledge that many of them do regard it as a sacred obligation, and show a willingness to obey the commands of God on this subject. Marriage is, indeed, the first and most important institution of human existence — the foundation of all civilisation and culture — the root of church and state. It is the most intimate covenant of heart formed among mankind; and for many persons the only relation in which they feel the true sentiments of humanity. It gives scope for every human virtue, since each of these is developed from the love and confidence which here predominate. It unites all which ennobles and beautifies life, — sympathy, kindness of will and deed, gratitude, devotion, and every delicate,

intimate feeling. As the only asylum for true education, it is the first and last sanctuary of human culture. As husband and wife through each other become conscious of complete humanity, and every human feeling, and every human virtue; so children, at their first awakening in the fond covenant of love between parents, both of whom are tenderly concerned for the same object, find an image of complete humanity leagued in free love. The spirit of love which prevails between them acts with creative power upon the young mind, and awakens every germ of goodness within it. This invisible and incalculable influence of parental life acts more upon the child than all the efforts of education, whether by means of instruction, precept, or exhortation. If this be a true picture of the vast influence for good of the institution of marriage, what must be the moral degradation of that people to whom marriage is denied? Not content with depriving them of all the higher and holier enjoyments of this relation, by degrading and darkening their souls, the slaveholder denies to his victim even that slight alleviation of his misery, which would result from the marriage relation being protected by law and public opinion. Such is the influence of slavery in the United States, that the ministers of religion, even in the so-called free states, are the mere echoes, instead of the correctors, of public sentiment.

We have thought it advisable to show that the present system of chattel slavery in America undermines the entire social condition of man, so as to prepare the reader for the following narrative of slave life, in that otherwise happy and prosperous country.

In all the large towns in the Southern States, there is a class of slaves who are permitted to hire their time of their owners, and for which they pay a high price. These are mulatto women, or quadroons, as they are familiarly known, and are distinguished for their fascinating beauty.[6] The handsomest usually pays the highest price for her time. Many of these

6. A quadroon was technically a person of one-fourth black blood; *mulatto* was a more general designation for a person of mixed race. Such terms were attempts to define and fix status in Southern states, where racial classification treated black blood like dominant genes. A person of as little as one-eighth (octoroon) or even one-sixteenth black blood was in some states categorized as wholly "negro."

women are the favourites of persons who furnish them with the means of paying their owners, and not a few are dressed in the most extravagant manner. Reader, when you take into consideration the fact, that amongst the slave population no safeguard is thrown around virtue, and no inducement held out to slave women to be chaste, you will not be surprised when we tell you that immorality and vice pervade the cities of the Southern States in a manner unknown in the cities and towns of the Northern States. Indeed most of the slave women have no higher aspiration than that of becoming the finely-dressed mistress of some white man. And at negro balls and parties, this class of women usually cut the greatest figure.

At the close of the year — the following advertisement appeared in a newspaper published in Richmond, the capital of the state of Virginia: — "Notice: Thirty-eight negroes will be offered for sale on Monday, November 10th, at twelve o'clock, being the entire stock of the late John Graves, Esq. The negroes are in good condition, some of them very prime; among them are several mechanics, able-bodied field hands, plough-boys, and women with children at the breast, and some of them very prolific in their generating qualities, affording a rare opportunity to any one who wishes to raise a strong and healthy lot of servants for their own use. Also several mulatto girls of rare personal qualities: two of them very superior. Any gentleman or lady wishing to purchase, can take any of the above slaves on trial for a week, for which no charge will be made."[7] Amongst the above slaves to be sold were Currer and her two daughters, Clotel and Althesa; the latter were the girls spoken of in the advertisement as "very superior." Currer was a bright mulatto, and of prepossessing appearance, though then nearly forty years of age. She had hired her time for more than twenty years, during which time she had lived in Richmond. In her younger days Currer had been the housekeeper of a young slaveholder; but of later years had been a laundress or washerwoman, and was considered to be a woman of great taste

7. Advertisements for slave sales were a commonplace in antebellum Southern newspapers. Brown's text adhered closely to the wording of such advertisements.

in getting up linen. The gentleman for whom she had kept house was Thomas Jefferson, by whom she had two daughters. Jefferson being called to Washington to fill a government appointment, Currer was left behind, and thus she took herself to the business of washing, by which means she paid her master, Mr. Graves, and supported herself and two children. At the time of the decease of her master, Currer's daughters, Clotel and Althesa, were aged respectively sixteen and fourteen years, and both, like most of their own sex in America, were well grown. Currer early resolved to bring her daughters up as ladies, as she termed it, and therefore imposed little or no work upon them. As her daughters grew older, Currer had to pay a stipulated price for them; yet her notoriety as a laundress of the first class enabled her to put an extra price upon her charges, and thus she and her daughters lived in comparative luxury. To bring up Clotel and Althesa to attract attention, and especially at balls and parties, was the great aim of Currer. Although the term "negro ball" is applied to most of these gatherings, yet a majority of the attendants are often whites.[8] Nearly all the negro parties in the cities and towns of the Southern States are made up of quadroon and mulatto girls, and white men. These are democratic gatherings, where gentlemen, shopkeepers, and their clerks, all appear upon terms of perfect equality. And there is a degree of gentility and decorum in these companies that is not surpassed by similar gatherings of white people in the Slave States. It was at one of these parties that Horatio Green, the son of a wealthy gentleman of Richmond, was first introduced to Clotel. The young man had just returned from college, and was in his twenty-second year. Clotel was sixteen, and was admitted by all to be the most beautiful girl, coloured or white, in the city. So attentive was the young man to the quadroon during the evening that it was noticed by all, and became a matter of general conversation; while Currer appeared delighted beyond measure

8. Negro balls were typically held in cities with large populations of free blacks, such as New Orleans, St. Louis, Charleston, and Richmond. These affairs reflected the stratification of status even within the black community, where men and women of lighter complexion, such as Clotel and Althesa, generally had higher status than did people of darker complexion.

at her daughter's conquest. From that evening, young Green became the favourite visitor at Currer's house. He soon promised to purchase Clotel, as speedily as it could be effected, and make her mistress of her own dwelling; and Currer looked forward with pride to the time when she should see her daughter emancipated and free. It was a beautiful moonlight night in August, when all who reside in tropical climes are eagerly gasping for a breath of fresh air, that Horatio Green was seated in the small garden behind Currer's cottage, with the object of his affections by his side. And it was here that Horatio drew from his pocket the newspaper, wet from the press, and read the advertisement for the sale of the slaves to which we have alluded; Currer and her two daughters being of the number. At the close of the evening's visit, and as the young man was leaving, he said to the girl, "You shall soon be free and your own mistress."

As might have been expected, the day of sale brought an unusual large number together to compete for the property to be sold. Farmers who make a business of raising slaves for the market were there; slave-traders and speculators were also numerously represented; and in the midst of this throng was one who felt a deeper interest in the result of the sale than any other of the bystanders; this was young Green. True to his promise, he was there with a blank bank check in his pocket, awaiting with impatience to enter the list as a bidder for the beautiful slave. The less valuable slaves were first placed upon the auction block, one after another, and sold to the highest bidder. Husbands and wives were separated with a degree of indifference that is unknown in any other relation of life, except that of slavery. Brothers and sisters were torn from each other; and mothers saw their children leave them for the last time on this earth.

It was late in the day, when the greatest number of persons were thought to be present, that Currer and her daughters were brought forward to the place of sale. Currer was first ordered to ascend the auction stand, which she did with a trembling step. The slave mother was sold to a trader. Althesa, the youngest, and who was scarcely less beautiful than her sister, was sold to the same trader for one thousand dollars. Clotel

was the last, and, as was expected, commanded a higher price than any that had been offered for sale that day. The appearance of Clotel on the auction block created a deep sensation amongst the crowd. There she stood, with a complexion as white as most of those who were waiting with a wish to become her purchasers; her features as finely defined as any of her sex of pure Anglo-Saxon; her long black wavy hair done up in the neatest manner; her form tall and graceful, and her whole appearance indicating one superior to her position.[9] The auctioneer commenced by saying, that "Miss Clotel had been reserved for the last, because she was the most valuable. How much gentlemen? Real Albino, fit for a fancy girl for any one. She enjoys good health, and has a sweet temper. How much do you say?" "Five hundred dollars." "Only five hundred for such a girl as this? Gentlemen, she is worth a deal more than that sum; you certainly don't know the value of the article you are bidding upon. Here, gentlemen, I hold in my hand a paper certifying that she has a good moral character." "Seven hundred." "Ah, gentlemen, that is something like. This paper also states that she is very intelligent." "Eight hundred." "She is a devoted Christian, and perfectly trustworthy." "Nine hundred." "Nine fifty." "Ten." "Eleven." "Twelve hundred." Here the sale came to a dead stand. The auctioneer stopped, looked around, and began in a rough manner to relate some anecdotes relative to the sale of slaves, which, he said, had come under his own observation. At this juncture the scene was indeed strange. Laughing, joking, swearing, smoking, spitting, and talking kept up a continual hum and noise amongst the crowd; while the slave-girl stood with tears in her eyes, at one time looking towards her mother and sister, and at another towards the young man whom she hoped would become her purchaser. "The chastity of this girl is pure; she has never been from under her mother's care; she is a virtuous creature." "Thirteen." "Fourteen." "Fifteen." "Fifteen hundred dollars," cried the auctioneer, and the maiden was struck for that sum.

9. The reference to Anglo-Saxon is a racial marker for "white" and the categorical equivalent, if practical obverse, of racial markers for "black" during the intensely racialized nineteenth century.

This was a Southern auction, at which the bones, muscles, sinews, blood, and nerves of a young lady of sixteen were sold for five hundred dollars; her moral character for two hundred; her improved intellect for one hundred; her Christianity for three hundred; and her chastity and virtue for four hundred dollars more. And this, too, in a city thronged with churches, whose tall spires look like so many signals pointing to heaven, and whose ministers preach that slavery is a God-ordained institution!

What words can tell the inhumanity, the atrocity, and the immorality of that doctrine which, from exalted office, commends such a crime to the favour of enlightened and Christian people? What indignation from all the world is not due to the government and people who put forth all their strength and power to keep in existence such an institution? Nature abhors it; the age repels it; and Christianity needs all her meekness to forgive it.

Clotel was sold for fifteen hundred dollars, but her purchaser was Horatio Green. Thus closed a negro sale, at which two daughters of Thomas Jefferson, the writer of the Declaration of American Independence, and one of the presidents of the great republic, were disposed of to the highest bidder!

"O God! my every heart-string cries,
Dost thou these scenes behold
In this our boasted Christian land,
And must the truth be told?

"Blush, Christian, blush! for e'en the dark,
Untutored heathen see
Thy inconsistency; and, lo!
They scorn thy God, and thee!"[10]

10. These lines also are from "The Slave-Auction—A Fact."

Chapter 6
The Religious Teacher

In this important chapter Brown presents a trenchant commentary on what he viewed as the unholy alliance between religion and slavery in the American South. Like many of his peers in the antislavery movement, Brown was a devout Protestant who saw the contest about the fate of slavery as involving religious principles no less than political ones. For Brown those principles could be preserved or perverted; there was no middle way.

The chapter contains the most complete discussion of ideas in *Clotel*, launching quickly into a three-sided war of ideas involving the plantation owner John Peck, his daughter Georgiana, and his visiting friend Miles Carlton. They argue about religion, natural rights, and race. Such debates were familiar to Brown and his contemporaries from popular controversial literature of the 1850s, not just from the antislavery circuit. At the center of this literature was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which Brown admired and whose influence (especially the chapters involving Augustine St. Clare and his daughter Eva) pervades this chapter.

The other centerpiece of this chapter is the outdoor religious service featuring a sermon preached to the slaves by Mr. Snyder, an itinerant preacher of Northern origin but in effect a servant of the slavocracy. Snyder's task is to teach the slaves satisfaction with their lot, a lesson, Brown knew, that was disseminated by pulpit and itinerant preachers every weekend across the antebellum South. The measure of Brown's revulsion can be gauged by the sermon he has Snyder deliver, which takes its scriptural text from the Christian Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12): "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." Designed to justify the unequal power relations of master and servant, such sermons, which Brown presumably heard in his own experience and unquestionably read in print, infuriated him as perversions of true Christianity, one of the few sources of consolation available to the American slave.

As a veteran of the political and cultural wars of the 1840s and 1850s, Brown understood that no text was sufficient unto itself. He therefore assiduously built into the scene not just the setting, the sermon, and its performance but also the captive audience's reception of the text and its performance. The interplay between Snyder and the slave audience turns out to be a game of cat and mouse, one that replays on a local stage the overarching sectional drama of master-slave relations. As the con-

temptuous reaction of Dick, Ned, Uncle Simon, and Aunt Dafney to Snyder's sermon demonstrates, such relations were generally more intricate and many-sided than they appeared.

> What! preach and enslave men?
> Give thanks — and rob thy own afflicted poor?
> Talk of thy glorious liberty, and then
> Bolt hard the captive's door? — *Whittier*[11]

The Rev. John Peck was a native of the state of Connecticut, where he was educated for the ministry, in the Methodist persuasion. His father was a strict follower of John Wesley, and spared no pains in his son's education, with the hope that he would one day be as renowned as the great leader of his sect.[12] John had scarcely finished his education at New Haven, when he was invited by an uncle, then on a visit to his father, to spend a few months at Natchez in the state of Mississippi. Young Peck accepted his uncle's invitation, and accompanied him to the South. Few young men, and especially clergymen, going fresh from a college to the South, but are looked upon as geniuses in a small way, and who are not invited to all the parties in the neighbourhood. Mr. Peck was not an exception to this rule. The society into which he was thrown on his arrival at Natchez was too brilliant for him not to be captivated by it; and, as might have been expected, he succeeded in captivating a plantation with seventy slaves, if not the heart of the lady to whom it belonged. Added to this, he became a popular preacher, had a large congregation with a snug salary. Like other planters, Mr. Peck confided the care of his farm to Ned Huckelby, an overseer of high reputation in his way. The Poplar Farm, as it was called, was situated in a beautiful valley nine miles from

11. From "Clerical Oppressors," by popular antislavery poet John Greenleaf Whittier.

12. John Wesley (1703–91), English clergyman and theologian, was the founder of Methodism. Wesley and his followers preached an evangelical commitment to issues of social justice, including abolition.

Natchez, and near the river Mississippi.[13] The once unshorn face of nature had given way, and now the farm blossomed with a splendid harvest, the neat cottage stood in a grove where Lombardy poplars lift their tufted tops almost to prop the skies; the willow, locust, and horse-chesnut spread their branches, and flowers never cease to blossom. This was the parson's country house, where the family spent only two months during the year.

The town residence was a fine villa, seated upon the brow of a hill at the edge of the city. It was in the kitchen of this house that Currer found her new home. Mr. Peck was, every inch of him, a democrat, and early resolved that his "people," as he called his slaves, should be well fed and not overworked, and therefore laid down the law and gospel to the overseer as well as the slaves.

"It is my wish," said he to Mr. Carlton, an old school-fellow, who was spending a few days with him, "it is my wish that a new system be adopted on the plantations in this estate. I believe that the sons of Ham should have the gospel, and I intend that my negroes shall.[14] The gospel is calculated to make mankind better, and none should be without it." "What say you," replied Carlton, "about the right of man to his liberty?" "Now, Carlton, you have begun again to harp about man's rights; I really wish you could see this matter as I do. I have searched in vain for any authority for man's natural rights; if he had any, they existed before the fall. That is, Adam and Eve may have had some rights which God gave them, and which modern philosophy, in its pretended reverence for the name of God, prefers to call natural rights. I can imagine they had the

13. Brown would reuse the name of the farm nearly three decades later in *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People*; see chapter 8.

14. Ham was widely viewed as the least favored of Noah's four sons after witnessing his father's nakedness during a drunken stupor (Genesis 9:22–27). According to interpretations current in Brown's time, the curse of servitude that Noah fixed on Ham (and Ham's sons) passed down to their supposed present-day descendants, people of black African descent. In this fashion many nineteenth-century apologists assigned a biblically sanctioned authority to their justification of slavery.

right to eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; they were restricted even in this by the prohibition of one. As far as I know without positive assertion, their liberty of action was confined to the garden. These were not 'inalienable rights,' however, for they forfeited both them and life with the first act of disobedience. Had they, after this, any rights? We cannot imagine them; they were condemned beings; they could have no rights, but by Christ's gift as king. These are the only rights man can have as an independent isolated being, if we choose to consider him in this impossible position, in which so many theorists have placed him. If he had no rights, he could suffer no wrongs. Rights and wrongs are therefore necessarily the creatures of society, such as man would establish himself in his gregarious state. They are, in this state, both artificial and voluntary. Though man has no rights, as thus considered, undoubtedly he has the power, by such arbitrary rules of right and wrong as his necessity enforces." "I regret I cannot see eye to eye with you," said Carlton. "I am a disciple of Rousseau, and have for years made the rights of man my study; and I must confess to you that I can see no difference between white men and black men as it regards liberty."[15] "Now, my dear Carlton, would you really have the negroes enjoy the same rights with ourselves?" "I would, most certainly. Look at our great Declaration of Independence; look even at the constitution of our own Connecticut, and see what is said in these about liberty." "I regard all this talk about rights as mere humbug. The Bible is older than the Declaration of Independence, and there I take my stand. The Bible furnishes to us the armour of proof, weapons of heavenly temper and mould, whereby we can maintain our ground against all attacks. But this is true only when we obey its directions, as well as employ its sanctions. Our rights are there established, but it is always in connection with our duties. If we neglect the one we cannot make good the other. Our domestic institutions can be maintained against the world, if we but allow Christianity to throw its broad shield over them.

15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), influential Swiss Enlightenment philosopher, writer, and reformer, was widely regarded in the United States as a proponent of the rights of individuals over and above the power of institutional authority.

But if we so act as to array the Bible against our social economy, they must fall. Nothing ever yet stood long against Christianity. Those who say that religious instruction is inconsistent with our peculiar civil polity, are the worst enemies of that polity. They would drive religious men from its defence. Sooner or later, if these views prevail, they will separate the religious portion of our community from the rest, and thus divided we shall become an easy prey. Why, is it not better that Christian men should hold slaves than unbelievers? We know how to value the bread of life, and will not keep it from our slaves."

"Well, every one to his own way of thinking," said Carlton, as he changed his position. "I confess," added he, "that I am no great admirer of either the Bible or slavery. My heart is my guide: my conscience is my Bible. I wish for nothing further to satisfy me of my duty to man. If I act rightly to mankind, I shall fear nothing." Carlton had drunk too deeply of the bitter waters of infidelity, and had spent too many hours over the writings of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Thomas Paine, to place that appreciation upon the Bible and its teachings that it demands.[16] During this conversation there was another person in the room, seated by the window, who, although at work upon a fine piece of lace, paid every attention to what was said. This was Georgiana, the only daughter of the parson. She had just returned from Connecticut, where she had finished her education. She had had the opportunity of contrasting the spirit of Christianity and liberty in New England with that of slavery in her native state, and had learned to feel deeply for the injured negro. Georgiana was in her nineteenth year, and had been much benefited by a residence of five years at the North. Her form was tall and graceful; her features regular and well defined; and her complexion was illuminated by the freshness of youth, beauty, and health. The daughter differed from both the father

16. François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778), French writer, philosopher, and intellectual; and Thomas Paine (1737–1809), English writer, activist, and polemicist, led Enlightenment opposition to established religion, clericalism, and traditional authority. Despite their progressive views Brown disapprovingly relegated them, with Rousseau, to the category of religious skeptics.

and his visitor upon the subject which they had been discussing, and as soon as an opportunity offered, she gave it as her opinion, that the Bible was both the bulwark of Christianity and of liberty. With a smile she said, "Of course, papa will overlook my differing from him, for although I am a native of the South, I am by education and sympathy a Northerner." Mr. Peck laughed and appeared pleased, rather than otherwise, at the manner in which his daughter had expressed herself.

From this Georgiana took courage and said, "We must try the character of slavery, and our duty in regard to it, as we should try any other question of character and duty. To judge justly of the character of anything, we must know what it does. That which is good does good, and that which is evil does evil. And as to duty, God's designs indicate his claims. That which accomplishes the manifest design of God is right; that which counteracts it, wrong. Whatever, in its proper tendency and general effect, produces, secures, or extends human welfare, is according to the will of God, and is good; and our duty is to favour and promote, according to our power, that which God favours and promotes by the general law of his providence. On the other hand, whatever in its proper tendency and general effect destroys, abridges, or renders insecure, human welfare, is opposed to God's will, and is evil. And as whatever accords with the will of God, in any manifestation of it should be done and persisted in, so whatever opposes that will should not be done, and if done, should be abandoned. Can that then be right, be well doing — can that obey God's behest, which makes a man a slave? which dooms him and all his posterity, in limitless generations, to bondage, to unrequited toil through life? 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'[17] This single passage of Scripture should cause us to have respect to the rights of the slave. True Christian love is of an enlarged, disinterested nature. It loves all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, without regard to colour or condition."

17. Georgiana quotes, with Brown's implicit approval, from Leviticus 19:18. This Old Testament text parallels the New Testament text quoted a bit later in this chapter by Hontz Snyder, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them" (Matthew 7:12). Georgiana and Snyder, however, draw opposite interpretations.

"Georgiana, my dear, you are an abolitionist; your talk is fanaticism," said Mr. Peck in rather a sharp tone; but the subdued look of the girl, and the presence of Carlton, caused the father to soften his language. Mr. Peck having lost his wife by consumption, and Georgiana being his only child, he loved her too dearly to say more, even if he felt displeased.[18] A silence followed this exhortation from the young Christian. But her remarks had done a noble work. The father's heart was touched; and the sceptic, for the first time, was viewing Christianity in its true light.

"I think I must go out to your farm," said Carlton, as if to break the silence. "I shall be pleased to have you go," returned Mr. Peck. "I am sorry I can't go myself, but Huckelby will show you every attention; and I feel confident that when you return to Connecticut, you will do me the justice to say, that I am one who looks after my people, in a moral, social, and religious point of view." "Well, what do you say to my spending next Sunday there?" "Why, I think that a good move; you will then meet with Snyder, our missionary." "Oh, you have missionaries in these parts, have you?" "Yes," replied Mr. Peck; "Snyder is from New York, and is our missionary to the poor, and preaches to our 'people' on Sunday; you will no doubt like him; he is a capital fellow." "Then I shall go," said Carlton, "but only wish I had company." This last remark was intended for Miss Peck, for whom he had the highest admiration.

It was on a warm Sunday morning, in the month of May, that Miles Carlton found himself seated beneath a fine old apple tree, whose thick leaves entirely shaded the ground for some distance round. Under similar trees and near by, were gathered together all the "people" belonging to the plantation. Hontz Snyder was a man of about forty years of age, exceedingly low in stature, but of a large frame. He had been brought up in the Mohawk Valley, in the state of New York, and claimed relationship with the oldest Dutch families in that vicinity. He had once been a sailor, and had all the roughness of character that a sea-faring man might expect to possess; together with the half-Yankee, half-German peculiarities

18. Consumption, an early term for tuberculosis, was one of the most dreaded diseases of the nineteenth century.

of the people of the Mohawk Valley. It was nearly eleven o'clock when a one-horse waggon drove up in haste, and the low squatty preacher got out and took his place at the foot of one of the trees, where a sort of rough board table was placed, and took his books from his pocket and commenced.

"As it is rather late," said he, "we will leave the singing and praying for the last, and take our text, and commence immediately. I shall base my remarks on the following passage of Scripture, and hope to have that attention which is due to the cause of God:—'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them'; that is, do by all mankind just as you would desire they should do by you, if you were in their place and they in yours.[19]

"Now, to suit this rule to your particular circumstances, suppose you were masters and mistresses, and had servants under you, would you not desire that your servants should do their business faithfully and honestly, as well when your back was turned as while you were looking over them? Would you not expect that they should take notice of what you said to them? that they should behave themselves with respect towards you and yours, and be as careful of every thing belonging to you as you would be yourselves? You are servants: do, therefore, as you would wish to be done by, and you will be both good servants to your masters and good servants to God, who requires this of you, and will reward you well for it, if you do it for the sake of conscience, in obedience to his commands.

"You are not to be eye-servants. Now, eye-servants are such as will work hard, and seem mighty diligent, while they think anybody is taking notice of them; but, when their masters' and mistresses' backs are turned they are idle, and neglect their business. I am afraid there are a great many such eye-servants among you, and that you do not consider how great a sin it is to be so, and how severely God will punish you for it. You may easily deceive your owners, and make them have an opinion of you that you do not deserve, and get the praise of men by it; but remember that you cannot deceive Almighty God, who sees your wickedness and

19. Another restatement of Matthew 7:12.

deceit, and will punish you accordingly. For the rule is, that you must obey your masters in all things, and do the work they set you about with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service as to the Lord, and not as to men.[20]

"*Take care that you do not fret or murmur, grumble or repine at your condition; for this will not only make your life uneasy, but will greatly offend Almighty God.* Consider that it is not yourselves, it is not the people that you belong to, it is not the men who have brought you to it, but *it is the will of God who hath by his providence made you servants, because, no doubt, he knew that condition would be best for you in this world, and help you the better towards heaven, if you would but do your duty in it.* So that any discontent at your not being free, or rich, or great, as you see some others, is quarrelling with your heavenly Master, and finding fault with God himself, who hath made you what you are, and hath promised you as large a share in the kingdom of heaven as the greatest man alive, if you will but behave yourself aright, and do the business he hath set you about in this world honestly and cheerfully. Riches and power have proved the ruin of many an unhappy soul, by drawing away the heart and affections from God, and fixing them on mean and sinful enjoyments; so that, when God, who knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves, sees that they would be hurtful to us, and therefore keeps them from us, it is the greatest mercy and kindness he could show us.

"You may perhaps fancy that, if you had riches and freedom, you could do your duty to God and man with greater pleasure than you can now. But pray consider that, if you can but save your souls through the mercy of God, you will have spent your time to the best of purposes in this world; and he that at last can get to heaven has performed a noble

20. Snyder is paraphrasing Colossians 3:22: "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." Snyder was following a common interpretive practice in invoking this verse to justify slavery. This biblical passage is quoted formally in the catechism that follows the sermon.

journey, let the road be ever so rugged and difficult. Besides, you really have a great advantage over most white people, who have not only the care of their daily labour upon their hands, but the care of looking forward and providing necessaries for to-morrow and next day, and of clothing and bringing up their children, and of getting food and raiment for as many of you as belong to their families, which often puts them to great difficulties, and distracts their minds so as to break their rest, and take off their thoughts from the affairs of another world. Whereas you are quite eased from all these cares, and have nothing but your daily labour to look after, and, when that is done, take your needful rest. Neither is it necessary for you to think of laying up anything against old age, as white people are obliged to do; for the laws of the country have provided that you shall not be turned off when you are past labour, but shall be maintained, while you live, by those you belong to, whether you are able to work or not.

"There is only one circumstance which may appear grievous, that I shall now take notice of, and that is correction.

"Now, when correction is given you, you either deserve it, or you do not deserve it. But whether you really deserve it or not, it is your duty, and Almighty God requires that you bear it patiently. You may perhaps think that this is hard doctrine; but, if you consider it right, you must needs think otherwise of it. Suppose, then, that you deserve correction, you cannot but say that it is just and right you should meet with it. Suppose you do not, or at least you do not deserve so much, or so severe a correction, for the fault you have committed, you perhaps have escaped a great many more, and are at last paid for all. Or suppose you are quite innocent of what is laid to your charge, and suffer wrongfully in that particular thing, is it not possible you may have done some other bad thing which was never discovered, and that Almighty God who saw you doing it would not let you escape without punishment one time or another? And ought you not, in such a case, to give glory to him, and be thankful that he would rather punish you in this life for your wickedness than destroy your souls for it in the next life? But suppose even this was not the case (a case hardly to be imagined), and that you have by no

means, known or unknown, deserved the correction you suffered, there is this great comfort in it, that, if you bear it patiently, and leave your cause in the hands of God, he will reward you for it in heaven, and the punishment you suffer unjustly here shall turn to your exceeding great glory hereafter.

"Lastly, you should serve your masters faithfully, because of their goodness to you. See to what trouble they have been on your account. Your fathers were poor ignorant and barbarous creatures in Africa, and the whites fitted out ships at great trouble and expense and brought you from that benighted land to Christian America, where you can sit under your own vine and fig tree and no one molest or make you afraid. Oh, my dear black brothers and sisters, you are indeed a fortunate and a blessed people. Your masters have many troubles that you know nothing about. If the banks break, your masters are sure to lose something. If the crops turn out poor, they lose by it. If one of you die, your master loses what he paid for you, while you lose nothing. Now let me exhort you once more to be faithful."

Often during the delivery of the sermon did Snyder cast an anxious look in the direction where Carlton was seated; no doubt to see if he had found favour with the stranger. Huckelby, the overseer, was also there, seated near Carlton. With all Snyder's gesticulations, sonorous voice, and occasionally bringing his fist down upon the table with the force of a sledge hammer, he could not succeed in keeping the negroes all interested: four or five were fast asleep, leaning against the trees; as many more were nodding, while not a few were stealthily cracking and eating hazelnuts. "Uncle Simon, you may strike up a hymn," said the preacher as he closed his Bible. A moment more, and the whole company (Carlton excepted) had joined in the well known hymn, commencing with

"When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the sky."[21]

21. From "Hymn 65" in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* of Isaac Watts (1674–1748), a popular English religious poet and major figure of English hymnody. These lines were quoted by American slaves with great frequency.

After the singing, Sandy closed with prayer, and the following questions and answers read, and the meeting was brought to a close.

"Q. What command has God given to servants concerning obedience to their masters? — A. 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.'

"Q. What does God mean by masters according to the flesh? — A. 'Masters in this world.'

"Q. What are servants to count their masters worthy of? — A. 'All honour.'

"Q. How are they to do the service of their masters? — A. '*With good will*, doing service as unto the Lord, and not unto men.'

"Q. How are they to try to please their masters? — A. 'Please him well in all things, not answering again.'

"Q. Is a servant who is an eye-servant to his earthly master an eye-servant to his heavenly master? — A. 'Yes.'

"Q. Is it right in a servant, when commanded to do any thing, to be sullen and slow, and answer his master again? — A. 'No.'

"Q. If the servant professes to be a Christian, ought he not to be *as a Christian servant*, an example to all other servants of love and obedience to his master? — A. 'Yes.'

"Q. And, should his master be a Christian also, ought he not on that account specially to love and obey him? — A. 'Yes.'

"Q. But suppose the master is hard to please, and threatens and punishes more than he ought, what is the servant to do? — A. 'Do his best to please him.'

"Q. When the servant suffers *wrongfully* at the hands of his master, and, to please God, takes it patiently, will God reward him for it? — A. 'Yes.'

"Q. Is it right for the servant to *run away*, or is it right to *harbour* a runaway? — A. 'No.'

"Q. If a servant runs away, what should be done with him? — A. 'He should be caught and brought back.'

"Q. When he is brought back, what should be done with him? — A. 'Whip him well.'

"Q. Why may not the whites be slaves as well as the blacks? — A. 'Because the Lord intended the negroes for slaves.'

"Q. Are they better calculated for servants than the whites? — A. 'Yes, their hands are large, the skin thick and tough, and they can stand the sun better than the whites.'

"Q. Why should servants not complain when they are whipped? — A. 'Because the Lord has commanded that they should be whipped.'

"Q. Where has He commanded it? — A. 'He says, He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.'[22]

"Q. Then is the master to blame for whipping his servant? — A. 'Oh, no! he is only doing his duty as a Christian.'"

Snyder left the ground in company with Carlton and Huckelby, and the three dined together in the overseer's dwelling.

"Well," said Joe, after the three white men were out of hearing, "Marser Snyder bin try hesef to-day." "Yes," replied Ned; "he want to show de strange gentman how good he can preach." "Dat's a new sermon he gib us to-day," said Sandy. "Dees white fokes is de very dibble," said Dick; "and all dey whole study is to try to fool de black people." "Didn't you like de sermon?" asked Uncle Simon. "No," answered four or five voices. "He rared and pitched enough," continued Uncle Simon.

Now Uncle Simon was himself a preacher, or at least he thought so, and was rather pleased than otherwise, when he heard others spoken of in a disparaging manner. "Uncle Simon can beat dat sermon all to pieces," said Ned, as he was filling his mouth with hazelnuts. "I got no notion of dees white fokes, no how," returned Aunt Dafney. "Dey all de time tellin' dat de Lord made us for to work for dem, and I don't believe a word of it." "Marser Peck give dat sermon to Snyder, I know," said Uncle Simon.

22. For an earlier reference to this biblical verse, see chapter 1, n. 34.

"He jest de one for dat," replied Sandy. "I think de people dat made de Bible was great fools," said Ned. "Why?" Uncle Simon. "Cause dey made such a great big book and put nuttin' in it, but servants obey yer masters." "Oh," replied Uncle Simon, "thars more in de Bible den dat, only Snyder never reads any other part to us; I use to hear it read in Maryland, and thar was more den what Snyder lets us hear." In the overseer's house there was another scene going on, and far different from what we have here described.

Chapter 22

A Ride in a Stage-Coach

This humorous chapter typifies the discursive narrative method that Brown practiced throughout this episodic novel. Entirely absent in some chapters, the novel's titular protagonist, Clotel, is present in this one but only as a silent witness riding along in a stagecoach. Her physical passage from slavery to eventual reunion with her daughter in Richmond may control the plot of this portion of the novel, but the attention of this chapter is centered less on her than on the circumambient American society—its sectional politics, discourse, and tall-tale tradition.

Orality is repeatedly breaking into print throughout this chapter. The stagecoach is populated by good talkers, passengers filling up the empty hours and bridging the gaps between people of diverse backgrounds by swapping stories. Given the intense sectional rivalries then roiling the United States, it is not surprising that Brown turns the exchange into a war of words between the Northern minister and the Southern gentleman, with the other passengers (including the disguised Clotel attempting to pass for a white gentleman) as audience.

We shall now return to Cincinnati, where we left Clotel preparing to go to Richmond in search of her daughter.[23] Tired of the disguise in which

23. Cincinnati, on the northern (i.e., nominally free) bank of the Ohio River, was an important transit point on the Underground Railroad well known to Brown from his own flight to freedom. Brown has Clotel travel along a route that skirts the Mason-Dixon Line before she risks her new freedom by dipping south into Richmond, Virginia, in the hope of being reunited with her daughter.

she had escaped, she threw it off on her arrival at Cincinnati. But being assured that not a shadow of safety would attend her visit to a city in which she was well known, unless in some disguise, she again resumed men's apparel on leaving Cincinnati.[24] This time she had more the appearance of an Italian or Spanish gentleman. In addition to the fine suit of black cloth, a splendid pair of dark false whiskers covered the sides of her face, while the curling moustache found its place upon the upper lip. From practice she had become accustomed to high-heeled boots, and could walk without creating any suspicion as regarded her sex. It was on a cold evening that Clotel arrived at Wheeling, and took a seat in the coach going to Richmond.[25] She was already in the state of Virginia, yet a long distance from the place of her destination.

A ride in a stage-coach, over an American road, is unpleasant under the most favourable circumstances. But now that it was winter, and the roads unusually bad, the journey was still more dreary. However, there were eight passengers in the coach, and I need scarcely say that such a number of genuine Americans could not be together without whiling away the time somewhat pleasantly. Besides Clotel, there was an elderly gentleman with his two daughters — one apparently under twenty years, the other a shade above. The pale, spectacled face of another slim, tall man, with a white neckerchief, pointed him out as a minister. The rough featured, dark countenance of a stout looking man, with a white hat on one side of his head, told that he was from the sunny South. There was nothing

24. In Clotel's act of simultaneously bending racial and gender lines, Brown is recalling the ruse of his friends Ellen (1826–91) and William (ca. 1824–1900) Craft—Ellen disguised herself as a white man and William posed as her slave. The Crafts, who were married, were close friends and allies of Brown's. Brown met them within days of the amazing escape from slavery that became the subject of their *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), one of the most remarkable of the slave narratives. Brown subsequently helped them to find employment in the North and on various occasions shared a lecture platform with them. He was reunited with them in England in 1851, to which they too had fled for fear for their safety after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. The Crafts did not return to the United States until 1869.

25. Wheeling is a port city on the Ohio River in northwestern West Virginia, whose counties separated from Virginia early in the Civil War and gained statehood in 1863 as a Unionist entity without abolishing slavery.

remarkable about the other two, who might pass for ordinary American gentlemen. It was on the eve of a presidential election, when every man is thought to be a politician. Clay, Van Buren, and Harrison were the men who expected the indorsement of the Baltimore Convention.[26] "Who does this town go for?" asked the old gent. with the ladies, as the coach drove up to an inn, where groups of persons were waiting for the latest papers. "We are divided," cried the rough voice of one of the outsiders. "Well, who do you think will get the majority here?" continued the old gent. "Can't tell very well; I go for 'Old Tip,'" was the answer from without.[27] This brought up the subject fairly before the passengers, and when the coach again started a general discussion commenced, in which all took a part except Clotel and the young ladies. Some were for Clay, some for Van Buren, and others for "Old Tip." The coach stopped to take in a real farmer-looking man, who no sooner entered than he was saluted with "Do you go for Clay?" "No," was the answer. "Do you go for Van Buren?" "No." "Well, then, of course you will go for Harrison." "No." "Why, don't you mean to work for any of them at the election?" "No." "Well, who will you work for?" asked one of the company. "I work for Betsy and the children, and I have a hard job of it at that," replied the farmer, without a smile. This answer, as a matter of course, set the new comer down as one upon whom the rest of the passengers could crack their jokes with the utmost impunity. "Are you an Odd Fellow?" asked one.[28] "No, sir, I've been married more than a month." "I mean, do you belong to the

26. This incident takes place against the background of the tempestuous 1840 presidential election, which pitted the Whig candidates Henry Clay (1771–1852) and William Henry Harrison (1773–1841) against the Democratic incumbent Martin Van Buren (1782–1862). Harrison won but died within a month of taking office, the briefest term of any U.S. president.

27. "Old Tip" was the nickname of Harrison, who earned it by leading the U.S. Army against the Shawnee tribe in 1811 at Tippecanoe (Indiana) and turned it to populist advantage in the 1840 presidential campaign.

28. Brown plays in successive fashion on the names of three secretive fraternal organizations: the Order of Odd Fellows, which dated to eighteenth-century England; the Freemasons, a widespread order claiming medieval origins and known for its secret signs of recognition and mysterious initiation rites; and the Sons of Temperance, a fast-growing society (founded in 1843) to promote prohibition.

order of Odd Fellows?" "No, no; I belong to the order of married men." "Are you a mason?" "No, I am a carpenter by trade." "Are you a Son of Temperance?" "Bother you, no; I am a son of Mr. John Gosling." After a hearty laugh in which all joined, the subject of Temperance became the theme for discussion. In this the spectacled gent. was at home. He soon showed that he was a New Englander, and went the whole length of the "Maine Law."[29] The minister was about having it all his own way, when the Southerner, in the white hat, took the opposite side of the question. "I don't bet a red cent on these teetotlars," said he, and at the same time looking round to see if he had the approbation of the rest of the company. "Why?" asked the minister. "Because they are a set who are afraid to spend a cent. They are a bad lot, the whole on 'em." It was evident that the white hat gent. was an uneducated man. The minister commenced in full earnest, and gave an interesting account of the progress of temperance in Connecticut, the state from which he came, proving, that a great portion of the prosperity of the state was attributable to the disuse of intoxicating drinks. Every one thought the white hat had got the worst of the argument, and that he was settled for the remainder of the night. But not he; he took fresh courage and began again. "Now," said he, "I have just been on a visit to my uncle's in Vermont, and I guess I knows a little about these here teetotlars. You see, I went up there to make a little stay of a fortnight. I got there at night, and they seemed glad to see me, but they didn't give me a bit of anything to drink. Well, thinks I to myself, the jig's up: I sha'n't get any more liquor till I get out of the state." We all sat up till twelve o'clock that night, and I heard nothing but talk about the 'Juvinal Temperance Army,' the 'Band of Hope,' the 'Rising Generation,' the 'Female Dorcas Temperance Society,' 'The None Such,' and I don't know how many other names they didn't have.[30] As I had taken several pretty large 'Cock Tails' before I entered the state, I thought upon the

29. In 1851 Maine became the first state to outlaw the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages; other states soon followed. Though writing humorously here, Brown was himself an outspoken proponent of temperance, a movement much more entrenched in Northern than Southern states.

30. These are the names of five temperance societies.

whole that I would not spile for the want of liquor. The next morning, I commenced writing back to my friends, and telling them what's what. Aunt Polly said, 'Well, Johnny, I s'pose you are given 'em a pretty account of us all here.' 'Yes,' said I; 'I am tellin' 'em if they want anything to drink when they come up here, they had better bring it with 'em.' 'Oh,' said aunty, 'they would search their boxes; can't bring any spirits in the state.' Well, as I was saying, jist as I got my letters finished, and was going to the post office (for uncle's house was two miles from the town), aunty says, 'Johnny, I s'pose you'll try to get a little somthin' to drink in town won't you?' Says I, 'I s'pose it's no use.' 'No,' said she, 'you can't; it aint to be had no how, for love nor money.' So jist as I was puttin' on my hat, 'Johnny,' cries out aunty, 'What,' says I. 'Now I'll tell you, I don't want you to say nothin' about it, but I keeps a little rum to rub my head with, for I am troubled with the headache; now I don't want you to mention it for the world, but I'll give you a little taste, the old man is such a teetotaller, that I should never hear the last of it, and I would not like for the boys to know it, they are members of the 'Cold Water Army.'"[31]

"Aunty now brought out a black bottle and gave me a cup, and told me to help myself, which I assure you I did. I now felt ready to face the cold. As I was passing the barn I heard uncle thrashing oats, so I went to the door and spoke to him. 'Come in, John,' says he. 'No,' said I; 'I am goin' to post some letters,' for I was afraid that he would smell my breath if I went too near to him. 'Yes, yes, come in.' So I went in, and says he, 'It's now eleven o'clock; that's about the time you take your grog, I s'pose, when you are at home.'[32] 'Yes,' said I. 'I am sorry for you, my lad; you can't get anything up here; you can't even get it at the chemist's, except as medicine, and then you must let them mix it and you take it in their presence.' 'This is indeed hard,' replied I; 'Well, it

31. The Cold Water Army was a youth temperance organization that urged water in place of hard beverages. Many adults followed the children's example; the most famous advocate of cold water was "Lemonade Lucy" Hayes, who refused to allow alcoholic drinks at White House functions of her husband, President Rutherford Hayes (served one term, 1877–81).

32. *Grog* was the common term of the time for hard liquor beverages cut with water and served hot, often with the addition of lemon juice and sugar.

can't be helped,' continued he: 'and it ought not to be if it could. It's best for society; people's better off without drink. I recollect when your father and I, thirty years ago, used to go out on a spree and spend more than half a dollar in a night. Then here's the rising generation; there's nothing like settin' a good example. Look how healthy your cousins are—there's Benjamin, he never tasted spirits in his life. Oh, John, I would you were a teetotaller.' 'I suppose,' said I, 'I'll have to be one till I leave the state.'[33] 'Now,' said he, 'John, I don't want you to mention it, for your aunt would go into hysterics if she thought there was a drop of intoxicating liquor about the place, and I would not have the boys to know it for anything, but I keep a little brandy to rub my joints for the rheumatics, and being it's you, I'll give you a little dust.' So the old man went to one corner of the barn, took out a brown jug and handed it to me, and I must say it was a little the best cogniac that I had tasted for many a day. Says I, 'Uncle, you are a good judge of brandy.' 'Yes,' said he, 'I learned when I was young.' So off I started for the post office. In returnin' I thought I'd jist go through the woods where the boys were chopping wood, and wait and go to the house with them when they went to dinner. I found them hard at work, but as merry as crickets. 'Well, cousin John, are you done writing?' 'Yes,' answered I. 'Have you posted them?' 'Yes.' 'Hope you didn't go to any place inquiring for grog.' 'No, I knowed it was no good to do that.' 'I suppose a cock-tail would taste good now.' 'Well, I guess it would,' says I. The three boys then joined in a hearty laugh. 'I suppose you have told 'em that we are a dry set up here?' 'Well, I aint told 'em anything else.' 'Now, cousin John,' said Edward, 'if you wont say anything, we will give you a small taste. For mercy's sake don't let father or mother know it; they are such rabid teetotallers, that they would not sleep a wink to-night if they thought there was any spirits about the place.' 'I am mum,' says I. And the boys took a jug out of a hollow stump, and gave me some first-rate peach brandy. And during the fortnight that I was in Vermont, with my teetotal relations, I was

33. Unlike Prohibition of the 1920s, which was national in scope, prohibition was enacted in the 1850s on a state-by-state basis.

kept about as well corned as if I had been among my hot water friends in Tennessee."[34]

This narrative, given by the white hat man, was received with unbounded applause by all except the pale gent. in spectacles, who showed, by the way in which he was running his fingers between his cravat and throat, that he did not intend to "give it up so." The white hat gent. was now the lion of the company.

"Oh, you did not get hold of the right kind of teetotallers," said the minister. "I can give you a tale worth a dozen of yours," continued he. "Look at society in the states where temperance views prevail, and you will there see real happiness. The people are taxed less, the poor houses are shut up for want of occupants, and extreme destitution is unknown. Every one who drinks at all is liable to become an habitual drunkard. Yes, I say boldly, that no man living who uses intoxicating drinks, is free from the danger of at least occasional, and if of occasional, ultimately of habitual excess. There seems to be no character, position, or circumstances that free men from the danger. *I have known* many young men of the finest promise, led by the drinking habit into vice, ruin, and early death. *I have known* many tradesmen whom it has made bankrupt. *I have known* Sunday scholars whom it has led to prison — teachers, and even superintendents, whom it has dragged down to profligacy. *I have known* ministers of high academic honours, of splendid eloquence, nay, of vast usefulness, whom it has fascinated, and hurried over the precipice of public infamy with their eyes open, and gazing with horror on their fate. *I have known* men of the strongest and clearest intellect and of vigorous resolution, whom it has made weaker than children and fools — gentlemen of refinement and taste whom it has debased into brutes — poets of high genius whom it has bound in a bondage worse than the galleys, and ultimately cut short their days. *I have known* statesmen, lawyers, and judges whom it has killed — kind husbands and fathers whom it has turned into monsters. *I have known* honest men whom it has

34. "Well corned" means well supplied with liquor; corn is one of the staple grains used in brewing.

made villains — elegant and Christian *ladies* whom it has *converted into bloated sots*."

"But you talk too fast," replied the white hat man. "You don't give a feller a chance to say nothin'." "I heard you," continued the minister, "and now you hear me out. It is indeed wonderful how people become lovers of strong drink. Some years since, before I became a teetotaller I kept spirits about the house, and I had a servant who was much addicted to strong drink. He used to say that he could not make my boots shine, without mixing the blacking with whiskey. So to satisfy myself that the whiskey was put in the blacking, one morning I made him bring the dish in which he kept the blacking, and poured in the whiskey myself. And now, sir, what do you think?" "Why, I s'pose your boots shined better than before," replied the white hat. "No," continued the minister. "He took the blacking out, and I watched him, and he drank down the whiskey, blacking, and all."

This turned the joke upon the advocate of strong drink, and he began to put his wits to work for arguments. "You are from Connecticut, are you?" asked the Southerner. "Yes, and we are an orderly, pious, peaceable people. Our holy religion is respected, and we do more for the cause of Christ than the whole Southern States put together." "I don't doubt it," said the white hat gent. "You sell wooden nutmegs and other spurious articles enough to do some good. You talk of your 'holy religion'; but your robes' righteousness are woven at Lowell and Manchester; your paradise is high per centum on factory stocks; your palms of victory and crowns of rejoicing are triumphs over a rival party in politics, on the questions of banks and tariffs.[35] If you could, you would turn heaven into Birmingham, make every angel a weaver, and with the eternal din of looms and spindles drown all the anthems of the morning stars. Ah! I know you Connecticut people like a book. No, no, all hoss; you can't

35. The Southerner is countering common Northern accusations about the brutality of slavery and the resultant corruption of the social order by arguing that unrestrained Northern capitalism and industrialization introduced social evils absent in the South. A typical extension of this argument, though not made here, was that the Southern chattel slave was better off than the Northern "wage slave."

come it on me." This last speech of the rough featured man again put him in the ascendant, and the spectacled gent. once more ran his fingers between his cravat and throat. "You live in Tennessee, I think," said the minister. "Yes," replied the Southerner, "I used to live in Orleans, but now I claim to be a Tennessean." "You people of New Orleans are the most ungodly set in the United States," said the minister. Taking a New Orleans newspaper from his pocket he continued, "Just look here, there are not less than three advertisements of bull fights to take place on the Sabbath. You people of the Slave States have no regard for the Sabbath, religion, morality or anything else intended to make mankind better." Here Clotel could have borne ample testimony, had she dared to have taken sides with the Connecticut man. Her residence in Vicksburgh had given her an opportunity of knowing something of the character of the inhabitants of the far South. "Here is an account of a grand bull fight that took place in New Orleans a week ago last Sunday. I will read it to you." And the minister read aloud the following:

"Yesterday, pursuant to public notice, came off at Gretna, opposite the Fourth District, the long heralded fight between the famous grizzly bear, General Jackson (victor in fifty battles), and the Attakapas bull, Santa Anna.[36]

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36. The geographical names in this story come from southern Louisiana (and some from the immediate New Orleans vicinity). This account of the staged fight between the outrageously named grizzly bear and bull looks back to the animal fight described in Brown's 1847 lecture to the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society (see chapter 2). It draws on the then-current vogue of southwestern tall tales, best known today for Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865). Andrew Jackson (1767–1845), military leader and politician, earned much of his military reputation from the 1814 Battle of New Orleans, which helped catapult him to the White House (1829–37). Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna (1794–1876) was the long-time dictator and military commander of Mexico, notorious in his own country for his strong-arm methods and reviled in the United States for his take-no-prisoners policy at the 1836 battles at the Alamo and Goliad during Texas's fight for independence from Mexico.

Brown's use of these figures evokes the recent Mexican-American War. The outcome of the fight between the U.S. bear and Mexican bull undermines conventional expectations of an American victory—until one recalls that Brown strongly opposed the war, which he saw as likely to lead to the expansion of slavery.

"The fame of the coming conflict had gone forth to the four winds, and women and children, old men and boys, from all parts of the city, and from the breezy banks of Lake Pontchartrain and Borgne, brushed up their Sunday suit, and prepared to see the fun. Long before the published hour, the quiet streets of the rural Gretna were filled with crowds of anxious denizens, flocking to the arena, and before the fight commenced, such a crowd had collected as Gretna had not seen, nor will be likely to see again.

"The arena for the sports was a cage, twenty feet square, built upon the ground, and constructed of heavy timbers and iron bars. Around it were seats, circularly placed, and intended to accommodate many thousands. About four or five thousand persons assembled, covering the seats as with a cloud, and crowding down around the cage, were within reach of the bars.

"The bull selected to sustain the honour and verify the pluck of Attakapas on this trying occasion was a black animal from the Opelousas, lithe and sinewy as a four year old courser, and with eyes like burning coals. His horns bore the appearance of having been filed at the tips, and wanted that keen and slashing appearance so common with others of his kith and kin; otherwise it would have been 'all day' with Bruin at the first pass, and no mistake.

"The bear was an animal of note, and called General Jackson, from the fact of his licking up everything that came in his way, and taking 'the responsibility' on all occasions. He was a wicked looking beast, very lean and unamiable in aspect, with hair all standing the wrong way. He had fought some fifty bulls (so they said), always coming out victorious, but that either one of the fifty had been an Attakapas bull, the bills of the performances did not say. Had he tackled Attakapas first it is likely his fifty battles would have remained unfought.

"About half past four o'clock the performances commenced.

"The bull was first seen, standing in the cage alone, with head erect, and looking a very monarch in his capacity. At an appointed signal, a cage containing the bear was placed alongside the arena, and an opening being made, bruin stalked into the battle ground — not, however, without

sundry stirrings up with a ten foot pole, he being experienced in such matters, and backwards in raising a row.

"Once on the battle-field, both animals stood, like wary champions, eyeing each other, the bear cowering low, with head upturned and fangs exposed, while Attakapas stood wondering, with his eye dilated, lashing his sides with his long and bushy tail, and pawing up the earth in very wrath.

"The bear seemed little inclined to begin the attack, and the bull, standing a moment, made steps first backward and then forward, as if measuring his antagonist, and meditating where to plant a blow. Bruin wouldn't come to the scratch no way, till one of the keepers, with an iron rod, tickled his ribs and made him move. Seeing this, Attakapas took it as a hostile demonstration, and, gathering his strength, dashed savagely at the enemy, catching him on the points of his horns, and doubling him up like a sack of bran against the bars. Bruin 'sung out' at this, and made a dash for his opponent's nose.

"Missing this, the bull turned to the 'about face,' and the bear caught him by the ham, inflicting a ghastly wound. But Attakapas with a kick shook him off, and renewing the attack, went at him again, head on and with a rush. This time he was not so fortunate, for the bear caught him above the eye, burying his fangs in the tough hide, and holding him as in a vice. It was now the bull's turn to 'sing out,' and he did it, bellowing forth with a voice more hideous than that of all the bulls of Bashan.[37] Some minutes stood matters thus, and the cries of the bull, mingled with the hoarse growls of the bear, made hideous music, fit only for a dance of devils. Then came a pause (the bear having relinquished his hold), and for a few minutes it was doubtful whether the fun was not up. But the magic wand of the keeper (the ten foot pole) again stirred up bruin, and at it they went, and with a rush.

"Bruin now tried to fasten on the bull's back, and drove his tusks in

37. Bulls of Bashan — a loose reference to Psalms 22:12–13, where the animals are characterized as strong but not as loud.

him in several places, making the red blood flow like wine from the vats of Luna.[38] But Attakapas was pluck to the back bone, and, catching bruin on the tips of his horns, shuffled him up right merrily, making the fur fly like feathers in a gale of wind. Bruin cried 'Nuff' (in bear language), but the bull followed up his advantage, and, making one furious plunge full at the figure head of the enemy, struck a horn into his eye, burying it there, and dashing the tender organ into darkness and atoms. Blood followed the blow, and poor bruin, blinded, bleeding, and in mortal agony, turned with a howl to leave, but Attakapas caught him in the retreat, and rolled him over like a ball. Over and over again this rolling over was enacted, and finally, after more than an hour, bruin curled himself up on his back, bruised, bloody, and dead beat. The thing was up with California, and Attakapas was declared the victor amidst the applause of the multitude that made the heavens ring."

"There," said he, "can you find anything against Connecticut equal to that?" The Southerner had to admit that he was beat by the Yankee. During all this time, it must not be supposed that the old gent. with the two daughters, and even the young ladies themselves, had been silent. Clotel and they had not only given their opinions as regarded the merits of the discussion, but that sly glance of the eye, which is ever given where the young of both sexes meet, had been freely at work. The American ladies are rather partial to foreigners, and Clotel had the appearance of a fine Italian. The old gentleman was now near his home, and a whisper from the eldest daughter, who was unmarried but marriageable, induced him to extend to "Mr. Johnson" an invitation to stop and spend a week with the young ladies at their family residence. Clotel excused herself upon various grounds, and at last, to cut short the matter, promised that she would pay them a visit on her return. The arrival of the coach at Lynchburgh separated the young ladies from the Italian gent., and the coach again resumed its journey.[39]

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38. The moon goddess Luna is often associated with wine and dance in classical mythology.

39. Lynchburg is situated near the Blue Ridge of central Virginia. It was connected to Richmond by the James River as well as by road.

CHAPTER FIVE

Writing African American Drama

Antebellum Americans relished the theater. From a marginal, sometimes even proscribed, pastime in colonial days, it grew by the mid–nineteenth century into a staple of American popular entertainment. Theaters opened by the dozens in cities, towns, and hamlets from coast to coast, concentrated in established cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans, and Cincinnati but also dispersed among the smaller communities springing up along waterways and railroad lines across the country. The clamoring for spectacle was such that entrepreneurs devised ingenious ways to attempt to profit from public demand, as by staging urban extravaganzas in the manner of P. T. Barnum or by mounting shows in exotic venues, such as flatboats, steamships, and trains.[1] Mark Twain was hardly exaggerating the public's appetite for theater (or the poor quality of some of the spectacles) with his depiction in *Huckleberry Finn* of the frenetic response of local crowds along the Mississippi River to the Royal Nonesuch of the Duke and Dauphin. But while Twain's royalty played to the rubes of the backcountry, a growing number of leading European performers made transatlantic tours through the major U.S. cities, and a new generation of American performers, such as Edwin Forrest, the Booths, and Thomas Dartmouth ("Daddy") Rice, became household names.[2]

1. Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–91), the prototypical American huckster, was the leading impresario in this early period of commercialized popular spectacle in the United States.

2. Edwin Forrest (1806–72) was the most heralded American actor of his generation. He played a wide variety of roles from American plays as well as the standard classical repertoire and was known for his bold, overstated style of performance. The Booths were the most famous acting family in the United States. The father, Junius (1796–1852), of English ancestry and

What the crowds of working- and middle-class people typically came to view were performances not of the classics but of melodrama during this, the greatest era of the melodrama on the American stage. As recent scholarship has persuasively shown, however, they also flocked in unprecedented numbers to view the minstrel show, a homegrown form of race-based entertainment that was a staple production of the American stage during the middle decades of the century. Despite its immense popularity and its practitioners' claims to lifelike authenticity, nothing about the minstrel show's display of white mimicry of black song, dance, speech, and costume was strictly "faithful" or "correct," as the era's practitioners routinely boasted.[3] Back in 1847 Brown had lamented in his address to the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society the impossibility of adequate representation of slavery even by a person who had endured its misery (see chapter 2). If so, how was it even remotely possible that white mimics could do any form of justice, including representational, to what they claimed was typical African American life? To a sharp-eyed observer like Brown, such staged mimicry raised many more questions about what constituted blackness (and, for that matter, whiteness) than it resolved.

An alternative way to conceive of antebellum race theater is to think of it and the antislavery lecture as complementary forms of popular entertainment. Brown undoubtedly did. In drawing his verbal sketch in *The American Fugitive* of Joseph Jenkins playing Othello (see chapter 3), Brown conjured associations with the antislavery activists Frederick Douglass, Martin Robison Delany, Charles Lenox Remond, and Henry Highland Garnet. From personal experience Brown knew that all versions of reform lecture — but perhaps the

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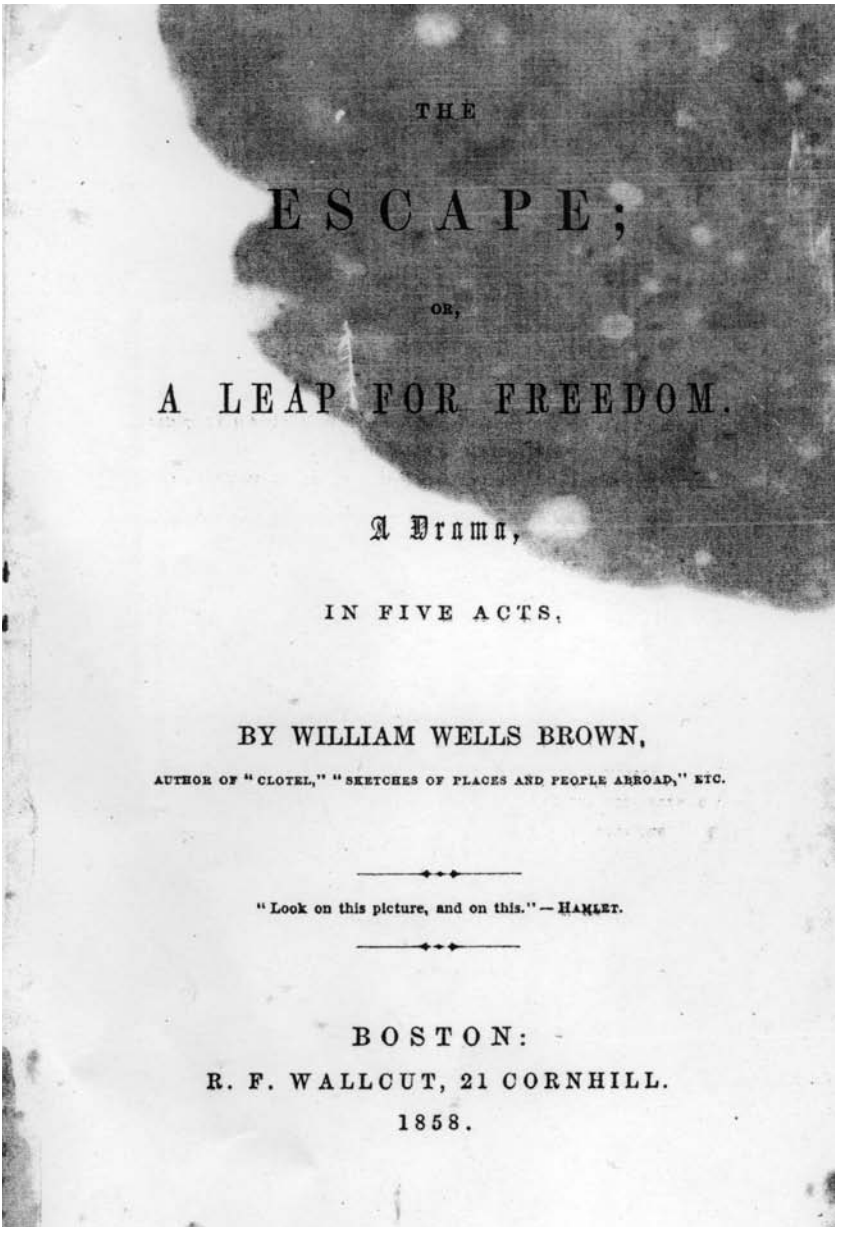
training, emigrated to the United States in 1821 and established himself as a leading tragedian. Two of his sons were also distinguished, though in radically different ways: Edwin (1833–93) as one of the premier actors of his generation, and John Wilkes (1838–65) as the assassin of Abraham Lincoln. Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1808–60), a white man, was an originator of the minstrel show and a wildly popular race entertainer.

3. For example, a minstrel troupe calling itself "the Ethiopian Melodists" advertised that it performed "the only acknowledged correct and graphic Selections of Ethiopian [the generic term for African] Melodies, Eccentricities, Melodies, Pastimes, giving a true representation of Negro Life" (*New York Tribune*, September 15, 1847). Competing claims about authenticity accompanied race-based performance well into the twentieth century.


THE

ESCAPE;

OR,

A LEAP FOR FREEDOM.

A Drama,

IN FIVE ACTS,

BY WILLIAM WELLS BROWN,

AUTHOR OF "CLOTEL," "SKETCHES OF PLACES AND PEOPLE ABROAD," ETC.

"Look on this picture, and on this." — HAMLET.

BOSTON:

R. F. WALLCUT, 21 CORNHILL.

1858.

Figure 3. Title page of *The Escape* (1858), the first printed African American play. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

antislavery variety in particular—lent themselves well to the dramatic. The settings of antislavery lectures were places of verbal combat, where powerful speakers using emotional, moralistic discourse aroused expectant crowds to hatred of a diabolical enemy. This moral combat, moreover, was perceived as two sided, with an enemy so pervasive as to be sensed as imminently or actually present. As professional agitators, antislavery activists understood the risks of their activities. Brown, for instance, not only knew about the murder of his one-time employer Elijah Lovejoy but on various occasions faced violent opposition himself.[4] Brown's moment of greatest danger came in 1848 when a riot broke out at an antislavery gathering on Cape Cod, at which he was beaten and, but for good fortune, might have been killed.

Among the great antislavery figures of this generation, it was Brown who most literally and literarily crossed the line between the lecture platform and the stage. He crossed it repeatedly during 1856–60 in giving one-man recitations of the two plays he is known to have composed during this period. The first was the now-lost *Experience, or, How to Give a Northern Man a Backbone* (first performed in 1856), an antislavery portrayal of a Northern white minister unjustly sold into slavery during a trip down South but eventually redeemed, restored to his normal state of freedom, and returned home a transformed man.[5] Brown performed solo recitations of this play across the Northern tier of states, typically charging admission fees ranging from ten to

4. Brown was an illiterate teenager when he worked for Lovejoy (1802–37), who had not yet embarked on his antislavery editorial career. About three years after employing Brown in his print shop for the *St. Louis Times*, Lovejoy took over operation of the *St. Louis Observer*, which he made controversial by adopting an antislavery editorial stance in a generally proslavery city. Run out of town in 1836 for refusing to moderate his views, Lovejoy set up his press across the Mississippi River in Alton, Illinois, and resumed his antislavery agitation. He was shot to death on the night of November 7, 1838, while defending his print shop against mob violence. Reports about his murder circulated nationally, turning Lovejoy into one of the earliest white martyrs of the antislavery movement.

5. The play was never printed, and no manuscript has survived. Its plot, however, has been retrievable through newspaper reports, since Brown's recitations and lectures (in common with antislavery lectures in general) were often attended by local journalists who reported on them in the next day's paper.

twenty-five cents.[6] The second was *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* (published in 1858), the earliest-known African American play to appear in print in the United States, which he likewise recited numerous times to antislavery audiences.[7] The frequency of Brown's recitations of these plays suggests that they were well received, a conclusion reinforced by the largely favorable reviews they got in the press. A typical response was that of a reviewer who attended Brown's recitation of *The Escape* in Utica, New York: "I wish all in every city and town could hear Mr. Brown's Drama, as read and recited by him. They could not but feel a deeper interest to deliver the country and the world from the curse of slavery."[8]

What led Brown to try his hand at drama in the late 1850s? The most likely answer is that at a time of unprecedented interest in race-based theater, whether in the form of minstrel shows or dramatic productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other such race-centered texts, he saw an opportunity to interject his own voice and sleight-of-hand into a mode of performance that not only fascinated him but allowed him to express his views of race and racial relations in a challenging new way.[9] Despite his lack of experience in the genre, he must have discerned commonalities not only between race-based drama and antislavery lectures but also between these and the literary work

6. One recitation took place (on November 12, 1856) before the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, the same group to which he read the 1847 antislavery lecture reprinted in chapter 2.

7. The earliest playwright of African American heritage to publish his plays was the French-speaking, New Orleans–born and –raised Victor Séjour (1817–74). Although technically a free person of color, Séjour sought greater freedom of person and expression and resettled in Paris sometime in the mid-1830s, and within a decade he established himself as a leading writer for the French stage. An important creative figure in his own right, Séjour anticipated the pattern of expatriation that became a commonplace in the twentieth century for both white and black American artists. His work, however, was largely unknown to his African American contemporaries.

8. Henry C. Wright, "William Wells Brown—His Dramas—Their Power for Good," *Liberator* 28 (October 8, 1858): 163.

9. Race-based dramas, melodramas, and minstrel shows and operas were common throughout the 1850s, a decade that ended with the opening performance, three days after John Brown's execution, of perhaps the best of them, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*.

he had already done in fiction and autobiography. In listing his authorial credentials beneath his name on the title page of *The Escape* as "Author of 'Clotel,' 'Sketches of Places and People Abroad,' etc.," Brown was also indirectly revealing the literary genealogy of his new work.

The Escape bears Brown's familiar fingerprints. He set the play on home territory in antebellum rural Kentucky, patterned its plot after fugitive slave narratives, including an escape route that followed his own up the Ohio River, and cast among its characters numerous figures — such as mixed-race slaves, hypocritical slave owners, and Quaker abolitionists — familiar from both his personal experience and his earlier works. He also returned to concerns important in his earlier productions: the sanctity of marriage and family and the irreparable damage that slavery did to familial relations for both blacks and whites, the permeability-impermeability of the color line, the discrepancy between slaveholders' values and practices, the illusive nature of Northerners' immunity from slavery, and the urgent necessity for both free whites and enslaved blacks to oppose the system. More than anything, however, the play reprised the fundamental premise of Brown's life and work: the inescapable centrality of race in American society.

But one major element present in all Brown's earlier works was largely lacking: an immediate stand-in for Brown himself. Instead of anchoring the work in an autobiographical persona, Brown dispersed his creative energies among a multiplicity of characters, situations, settings, discourses, and voices. Doing so freed Brown to display his zest and talent for mimicry. A musically gifted man with a keen ear, he responded approvingly to the performative abilities of a wide variety of gifted singers, actors, and orators. In *The Escape* Brown demonstrated his own ability by mimicking a wide range of both black and white voices, as well as his awareness of the degree to which mimicry was a two-bladed weapon. As wielded by whites in minstrelsy, it was a device for demeaning the intelligence and integrity of blacks for purposes of white identity formation; as wielded by blacks on stage and in private conversation, it was a device for undercutting power and reversing feelings of inferiority/superiority. Moving freely back and forth across the color line, Brown played both forms of mimicry against each other to purposeful effect.

The theatricality of drama allowed Brown to hold the mirror up to race with results that captured white and black figures in unexpectedly revealing poses. The production of an outraged man, *The Escape* enacts an exuberant unmasking of Southern and Northern stereotypes about race, class, and manners in antebellum America. Although its primary target is the pretense of racial purity, conjugal fidelity, and socioeconomic distinction affected by the Southern gentry (portrayed by the well-named Mr. and Mrs. Grimes), the play is unsparing as well in its exposure of hypocritical behavior by many people, including sanctimonious clergy, condescending slave traders, and obsequious servants. Brown repeatedly features his actors in scenes of intentional or unintentional posturing, though seldom the positions assigned by normative social customs and arrangements. The servile slave Cato, a character who would have been familiar to Brown's audience from attending minstrel shows, attempts to imitate his white master in speech, manner, and profession and even conspicuously dresses in his hand-me-downs. Finally, while escorting his master on a fugitive slave chase up North, Cato takes the role-playing to a logical extreme by stealing his master's clothes and running off a free man.[10] Cato's master, Dr. Grimes, who has no military experience or credentials, insists on passing himself off to his neighbors as a colonel. Grimes also affects the persona of a Southern gentleman even as he commits serial acts of sexual transgression. Likewise, Mrs. Grimes affects the persona of a Southern lady even as she has her slaves brutalized for crimes real or imagined. The itinerant preacher, John Pinchen, a saver of souls, finances his beneficence by trafficking in slaves during his evangelical journeys. Perhaps the strangest role player is the appropriately named Mr. White, a Massachusetts native of no strong principle who gets caught up in the fight about slavery despite his predilection for neutrality and runs around the stage trying to extricate himself from what he considers false positions. Worst of all is the model Southern plantation family, defender of class decorum

10. With Cato's possum act Brown anticipates Charles Chesnutt's great short story, "The Passing of Grandison," which Chesnutt published in *The Wife of His Youth, and Other Stories of the Color Line* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899).

and racial purity. When the Grimeses' new neighbor, Major Moore, comes to the big house to pay his respects, he "mistakes" a light-complexioned house servant for the son of both Dr. and Mrs. Grimes.[11]

Brown published the play with Robert F. Wallcut, a Boston publisher who had close ties to the Garrisonian antislavery circle and served as the general agent of the *Liberator*. Wallcut had recently published a variety of works by Garrison, annual meeting reports of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, as well as William C. Nell's pioneering *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855). Of more personal interest to Brown would have been Wallcut's recent publication of Josephine Brown's biography of her father (*Biography of an American Bondman*, 1856).

The text of *The Escape* comes from the 1858 Wallcut edition, the only known nineteenth-century printing. It follows the original edition in reprinting reviews of the play's recitation that Brown culled from the contemporary press. Those reviews may give today's readers some sense of contemporary reactions to the play's performance, as well as a glimpse of Brown's characteristic mode of self-promotion.[12]

11. This scene presumably derives from Brown's personal experience. A decade later he recounted a variation on this farce of racial misrepresentation in *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, in which it was he who was mistaken for his master's son (see chapter 7). Not yet done, he returned to it a third time in his final book, *My Southern Home*, in a probably fictional scene (see chapter 8).

12. The use of selective quotations from printed reviews for promotional purposes was a routine midcentury publishing practice. Successful authors could rely on their publishers to perform this service for them; Brown generally performed it for himself.

The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom: A Drama in Five Acts

by William Wells Brown

author of Clotel, Sketches of Places and People Abroad, Etc.

"Look on this picture, and on this."—*Hamlet*.[1]

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

This play was written for my own amusement, and not with the remotest thought that it would ever be seen by the public eye. I read it privately, however, to a circle of my friends, and through them was invited to read it before a Literary Society. Since then, the Drama has been given in various parts of the country. By the earnest solicitation of some in whose judgment I have the greatest confidence, I now present it in a printed form to the public. As I never aspired to be a dramatist, I ask no favor for it, and have little or no solicitude for its fate. If it is not readable, no word of mine can make it so; if it is, to ask favor for it would be needless.

The main features in the Drama are true. GLEN and MELINDA are actual characters, and still reside in Canada.[2] Many of the incidents were drawn from my own experience of eighteen years at the South. The marriage ceremony, as performed in the second act, is still adhered to in many of the Southern States, especially in the farming districts.

The ignorance of the slave, as seen in the case of "BIG SALLY," is

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The text of *The Escape* comes from the only known nineteenth-century printing (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1858).

1. Brown had already used this favorite quote (*Hamlet* 3.4.53) as the epigraph to his chapter on Joseph Jenkins in *The American Fugitive in Europe* (see chapter 3).

2. The actual identity of these people, if Brown is speaking truly, is unknown. The claim, however, is plausible, since Brown had an extensive acquaintance with the fugitive slave communities of Canada from his years of helping fugitives cross Lake Erie to freedom.

common wherever chattel slavery exists. The difficulties created in the domestic circle by the presence of beautiful slave women, as found in DR. GAINES'S family, is well understood by all who have ever visited the valley of the Mississippi.

The play, no doubt, abounds in defects, but as I was born in slavery, and never had a day's schooling in my life, I owe the public no apology for errors.

W.W.B.

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED.

DR. GAINES, *proprietor of the farm at Muddy Creek.*

REV. JOHN PINCHEN, *a clergyman.*

DICK WALKER, *a slave speculator.*

MR. WILDMARSH, *neighbor to Dr. Gaines.*

MAJOR MOORE, *a friend of Dr. Gaines.*

MR. WHITE, *a citizen of Massachusetts.*

BILL JENNINGS, *a slave speculator.*

JACOB SCRAGG, *overseer to Dr. Gaines.*

MRS. GAINES, *wife of Dr. Gaines.*

MR. and MRS. NEAL, and DAUGHTER, *Quakers, in Ohio.*

THOMAS, *Mr. Neal's hired man.*

GLEN, *slave of Mr. Hamilton, brother-in-law of Dr. Gaines.*

CATO, SAM, SAMPEY, MELINDA, DOLLY, SUSAN, and BIG SALLY, *slaves of Dr. Gaines.*

PETE, NED, and BILL, *slaves.*

OFFICERS, LOUNGERS, BARKEEPER, *&c.*

ACT I.

Scene 1.—A SITTING-ROOM

MRS. GAINES, *looking at some drawings*—
SAMPEY, a white slave, stands behind the lady's chair.

Enter DR. GAINES, R.

Dr. Gaines. Well, my dear, my practice is steadily increasing. I forgot to tell you that neighbor Wyman engaged me yesterday as his family physician; and I hope that the fever and ague, which is now taking hold of the people, will give me more patients. I see by the New Orleans papers that the yellow fever is raging there to a fearful extent. Men of my profession are reaping a harvest in that section this year. I would that we could have a touch of the yellow fever here, for I think I could invent a medicine that would cure it. But the yellow fever is a luxury that we medical men in this climate can't expect to enjoy; yet we may hope for the cholera.

Mrs. Gaines. Yes, I would be glad to see it more sickly here, so that your business might prosper. But we are always unfortunate. Every body here seems to be in good health, and I am afraid that they'll keep so. However, we must hope for the best. We must trust in the Lord. Providence may possibly send some disease amongst us for our benefit.

Enter CATO, R.

Cato. Mr. Campbell is at de door, massa.

Dr. G. Ask him in, Cato.

Enter MR. CAMPBELL, R.

Dr. G. Good morning, Mr. Campbell. Be seated.

Mr. Campbell. Good morning, doctor. The same to you, Mrs. Gaines. Fine morning, this.

Mrs. G. Yes, sir; beautiful day.

Mr. C. Well, doctor, I've come to engage you for my family physician. I am tired of Dr. Jones. I've lost another very valuable nigger under his treatment; and, as my old mother used to say, "change of pastures makes fat calves."

Dr. G. I shall be most happy to become your doctor. Of course, you want me to attend to your niggers, as well as to your family?

Mr. C. Certainly, sir. I have twenty-three servants. What will you charge me by the year?

Dr. G. Of course, you'll do as my other patients do, send your servants to me when they are sick, if able to walk?

Mr. C. Oh, yes; I always do that.

Dr. G. Then I suppose I'll have to lump it, and say $500 per annum.

Mr. C. Well, then, we'll consider that matter settled; and as two of the boys are sick, I'll send them over. So I'll bid you good day, doctor. I would be glad if you would come over some time, and bring Mrs. Gaines with you.

Dr. G. Yes, I will; and shall be glad if you will pay us a visit, and bring with you Mrs. Campbell. Come over and spend the day.

Mr. C. I will. Good morning, doctor.

[*Exit* MR. CAMPBELL, R.

Dr. G. There, my dear, what do you think of that? Five hundred dollars more added to our income. That's patronage worth having! And I am glad to get all the negroes I can to doctor, for Cato is becoming very useful to me in the shop. He can bleed, pull teeth, and do almost any thing that the blacks require.[3] He can put up medicine as well as any one. A valuable boy, Cato!

Mrs. G. But why did you ask Mr. Campbell to visit you, and to bring his wife? I am sure I could never consent to associate with her, for I un-

3. Bleeding (or bloodletting), often accomplished by the application of leeches, was a common nineteenth-century medical technique believed by many to have salutary effects.

derstand that she was the daughter of a tanner. You must remember, my dear, that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. The blood of the Wyleys runs in my veins. I am surprised that you should ask him to visit you at all; you should have known better.

Dr. G. Oh, I did not mean for him to visit me. I only invited him for the sake of compliments, and I think he so understood it; for I should be far from wishing you to associate with Mrs. Campbell. I don't forget, my dear, the family you were raised in, nor do I overlook my own family. My father, you know, fought by the side of Washington, and I hope some day to have a handle to my own name. I am certain Providence intended me for something higher than a medical man. Ah! by-the-by, I had forgotten that I have a couple of patients to visit this morning. I must go at once.

[*Exit* DR. GAINES, R.

Enter HANNAH, L.

Mrs. G. Go, Hannah, and tell Dolly to kill a couple of fat pullets, and to put the biscuit to rise. I expect brother Pinchen here this afternoon, and I want every thing in order. Hannah, Hannah, tell Melinda to come here.

[*Exit* HANNAH, L.

We mistresses do have a hard time in this world; I don't see why the Lord should have imposed such heavy duties on us poor mortals. Well, it can't last always. I long to leave this wicked world, and go home to glory.

Enter MELINDA.

I am to have company this afternoon, Melinda. I expect brother Pinchen here, and I want every thing in order. Go and get one of my new caps, with the lace border, and get out my scolloped-bottomed dimity petticoat, and when you go out, tell Hannah to clean the white-handled knives, and see that not a speck is on them; for I want every thing as it should be while brother Pinchen is here.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES, L, HANNAH, R.

Scene 2.—DOCTOR'S SHOP—CATO MAKING PILLS.

Enter DR. GAINES, L.

Dr. G. Well, Cato, have you made the batch of ointment that I ordered?

Cato. Yes, massa; I dun made de intment, an' now I is making the bread pills. De tater pills is up on the top shelf.

Dr. G. I am going out to see some patients. If any gentlemen call, tell them I shall be in this afternoon. If any servants come, you attend to them. I expect two of Mr. Campbell's boys over. You see to them. Feel their pulse, look at their tongues, bleed them, and give them each a dose of calomel. Tell them to drink no cold water, and to take nothing but water gruel.

Cato. Yes, massa; I'll tend to 'em.

[*Exit* DR. GAINES, L.

Cato. I allers knowed I was a doctor, an' now de ole boss has put me at it, I muss change my coat. Ef any niggers comes in, I wants to look suspectable. Dis jacket don't suit a doctor; I'll change it. [*Exit* CATO—*immediately returning in a long coat.*] Ah! now I looks like a doctor. Now I can bleed, pull teef, or cut off a leg. Oh! well, well, ef I aint put de pill stuff an' de intment stuff togedder. By golly, dat ole cuss will be mad when he finds it out, won't he? Nebber mind, I'll make it up in pills, and when de flour is on dem, he won't know what's in 'em; an' I'll make some new intment. Ah! yonder comes Mr. Campbell's Pete an' Ned; dems de ones massa sed was comin'. I'll see ef I looks right. [*Goes to the looking-glass and views himself.*] I em some punkins, ain't I? [*Knock at the door.*] Come in.

Enter PETE *and* NED, R.

Pete. Whar is de doctor?

Cato. Here I is; don't you see me?

Pete. But whar is de ole boss?

Cato. Dat's none you business. I dun tole you dat I is de doctor, an dat's enuff.

Ned. Oh! do tell us whar de doctor is. I is almos dead. Oh me! oh dear me! I is so sick. [*Horrible faces.*]

Pete. Yes, do tell us; we don't want to stan here foolin'.

Cato. I tells you again dat I is de doctor. I larn de trade under massa.

Ned. Oh! well, den, give me somethin' to stop dis pain. Oh dear me! I shall die. [*He tries to vomit, but can't — ugly faces.*]

Cato. Let me feel your pulse. Now put out your tongue. You is berry sick. Ef you don't mine, you'll die. Come out in de shed, an' I'll bleed you.

[*Exit all — re-enter.*

Cato. Dar, now take dese pills, two in de mornin' and two at night, and ef you don't feel better, double de dose. Now, Mr. Pete, what's de matter wid you?

Pete. I is got de cole chills, an' has a fever in de night.

Cato. Come out, an' I'll bleed you.

[*Exit all — re-enter.*

Now take dese pills, two in de mornin' and two at night, an' ef dey don't help you, double de dose. Ah! I like to forget to feel your pulse and look at your tongue. Put out your tongue. [*Feels his pulse.*] Yes, I tells by de feel ob your pulse dat I is gib you de right pills.

Enter MR. Parker's BILL, L.

Cato. What you come in dat door widout knockin' for?

Bill. My toof ache so, I didn't tink to knock. Oh, my toof! my toof! Whar is de doctor?

Cato. Here I is; don't you see me?

Bill. What! you de doctor, you brack cuss! You looks like a doctor! Oh, my toof! my toof! Whar is de doctor?

Cato. I tells you I is de doctor. Ef you don't believe me, ax dese men. I can pull your toof in a minnit.

Bill. Well, den, pull it out. Oh, my toof! how it aches! Oh, my toof! [*Cato gets the rusty turnkeys.*]

Cato. Now lay down on your back.

Bill. What for?

Cato. Dat's de way massa does.

Bill. Oh, my toof! Well, den, come on. [*Lies down, Cato gets astraddle of Bill's breast, puts the turnkeys on the wrong tooth, and pulls — Bill kicks, and cries out*] — Oh, do stop! Oh! oh! oh! [*Cato pulls the wrong tooth — Bill jumps up.*

Cato. Dar, now, I tole you I could pull your toof for you.

Bill. Oh, dear me! Oh, it aches yet! Oh me! Oh, Lor-e-massy! You dun pull de wrong toof. Drat your skin! ef I don't pay you for this, you brack cuss! [*They fight, and turn over table, chairs and bench — Pete and Ned look on.*

Enter DR. GAINES, R.

Dr. G. Why, dear me, what's the matter? What's all this about? I'll teach you a lesson, that I will. [*The doctor goes at them with his cane.*

Cato. Oh, massa! he's to blame, sir. He's to blame. He struck me fuss.

Bill. No, sir; he's to blame; he pull de wrong toof. Oh, my toof! oh, my toof!

Dr. G. Let me see your tooth. Open your mouth. As I live, you've taken out the wrong tooth. I am amazed. I'll whip you for this; I'll whip you well. You're a pretty doctor. Now lie down, Bill, and let him take out the right tooth; and if he makes a mistake this time, I'll cowhide him well. Lie down, Bill. [*Bill lies down, and Cato pulls the tooth.*] There now, why didn't you do that in the first place?

Cato. He wouldn't hole still, sir.

Bill. He lies, sir. I did hole still.

Dr. G. Now go home, boys; go home.

[*Exit* PETE, NED *and* BILL, L.

Dr. G. You've made a pretty muss of it, in my absence. Look at the table! Never mind, Cato; I'll whip you well for this conduct of yours today. Go to work now, and clear up the office.

[*Exit* DR. GAINES, R.

Cato. Confound dat nigger! I wish he was in Ginny. He bite my finger and scratch my face. But didn't I give it to him? Well, den, I reckon I did. [*He goes to the mirror; and discovers that his coat is torn — weeps.*] Oh, dear me! Oh, my coat — my coat is tore! Dat nigger has tore my coat. [*He gets angry, and rushes about the room frantic.*] Cuss dat nigger! Ef I could lay my hands on him, I'd tare him all to pieces, — dat I would. An' de ole boss hit me wid his cane after dat nigger tore my coat. By golly, I wants to fight somebody. Ef ole massa should come in now, I'd fight him. [*Rolls up his sleeves.*] Let 'em come now, ef dey dare — ole massa, or any body else; I'm ready for 'em.

Enter DR. GAINES, *R.*

Dr. G. What's all this noise here?

Cato. Nuffin', sir; only jess I is puttin' things to rights, as you tole me. I didn't hear any noise except de rats.

Dr. G. Make haste, and come in; I want you to go to town.

[*Exit* DR. GAINES, R.

Cato. By golly, de ole boss like to cotch me dat time, didn't he? But was n't I mad? When I is mad, nobody can do nuffin' wid me. But here's my coat, tore to pieces. Cuss dat nigger! [*Weeps.*] Oh, my coat! oh, my coat! I rudder he had broke my head den to tore my coat. Drat dat nigger! Ef he ever comes here agin, I'll pull out every toof he's got in his head — dat I will.

[*Exit,* R.

Scene 3.—A ROOM IN THE QUARTERS.

Enter GLEN, L.

Glen. How slowly the time passes away. I've been waiting here two hours, and Melinda has not yet come. What keeps her, I cannot tell. I waited long and late for her last night, and when she approached, I sprang to my feet, caught her in my arms, pressed her to my heart, and kissed away the tears from her moistened cheeks. She placed her trembling hand in mine, and said, "Glen, I am yours; I will never be the wife of another." I clasped her to my bosom, and called God to witness that I would ever regard her as my wife. Old Uncle Joseph joined us in holy wedlock by moonlight; that was the only marriage ceremony. I look upon the vow as ever binding on me, for I am sure that a just God will sanction our union in heaven. Still, this man, who claims Melinda as his property, is unwilling for me to marry the woman of my choice, because he wants her himself. But he shall not have her. What he will say when he finds that we are married, I cannot tell; but I am determined to protect my wife or die. Ah! here comes Melinda.

Enter MELINDA, R.

I am glad to see you, Melinda. I've been waiting long, and feared you would not come. Ah! in tears again?

Melinda. Glen, you are always thinking I am in tears. But what did master say to-day?

Glen. He again forbade our union.

Melinda. Indeed! Can he be so cruel?

Glen. Yes, he can be just so cruel.

Melinda. Alas! alas! how unfeeling and heartless! But did you appeal to his generosity?

Glen. Yes, I did; I used all the persuasive powers that I was master of, but to no purpose; he was inflexible. He even offered me a new suit of

clothes, if I would give you up; and when I told him that I could not, he said he would flog me to death if I ever spoke to you again.

Melinda. And what did you say to him?

Glen. I answered, that, while I loved life better than death, even life itself could not tempt me to consent to a separation that would make life an unchanging curse. Oh, I would kill myself, Melinda, if I thought that, for the sake of life, I could consent to your degradation. No, Melinda, I can die, but shall never live to see you the mistress of another man. But, my dear girl, I have a secret to tell you, and no one must know it but you. I will go out and see that no person is within hearing. I will be back soon.

[*Exit* GLEN, L.

Melinda. It is often said that the darkest hour of the night precedes the dawn. It is ever thus with the vicissitudes of human suffering. After the soul has reached the lowest depths of despair, and can no deeper plunge amid its rolling, foetid shades, then the reactionary forces of man's nature begin to operate, resolution takes the place of despondency, energy succeeds instead of apathy, and an upward tendency is felt and exhibited. Men then hope against power, and smile in defiance of despair. I shall never forget when first I saw Glen. It is now more than a year since he came here with his master, Mr. Hamilton. It was a glorious moonlight night in autumn. The wide and fruitful face of nature was silent and buried in repose. The tall trees on the borders of Muddy Creek waved their leafy branches in the breeze, which was wafted from afar, refreshing over hill and vale, over the rippling water, and the waving corn and wheat fields. The starry sky was studded over with a few light, flitting clouds, while the moon, as if rejoicing to witness the meeting of two hearts that should be cemented by the purest love, sailed triumphantly along among the shifting vapors.

Oh, how happy I have been in my acquaintance with Glen! That he loves me, I do well believe it; that I love him, it is most true. Oh, how I would that those who think the slave incapable of the finer feelings, could only see our hearts, and learn our thoughts,—thoughts that we

dare not utter in the presence of our masters! But I fear that Glen will be separated from me, for there is nothing too base and mean for master to do, for the purpose of getting me entirely in his power. But, thanks to Heaven, he does not own Glen, and therefore cannot sell him. Yet he might purchase him from his brother-in-law, so as to send him out of the way. But here comes my husband.

Enter GLEN, L.

Glen. I've been as far as the overseer's house, and all is quiet. Now, Melinda, as you are my wife, I will confide to you a secret. I've long been thinking of making my escape to Canada, and taking you with me. It is true that I don't belong to your master, but he might buy me from Hamilton, and then sell me out of the neighborhood.

Melinda. But we could never succeed in the attempt to escape.

Glen. We will make the trial, and show that we at least deserve success. There is a slave trader expected here next week, and Dr. Gaines would sell you at once if he knew that we were married. We must get ready and start, and if we can pass the Ohio river, we'll be safe on the road to Canada.

[*Exit,* R.

Scene 4.—DINING-ROOM.

REV. MR. PINCHEN *giving* MRS. GAINES *an account of his experience as a minister*—*HANNAH clearing away the breakfast table*—SAMPEY *standing behind* Mrs. GAINES' *chair.*

Mrs. Gaines. Now, do give me more of your experience, brother Pinchen. It always does my soul good to hear religious experience. It draws me nearer and nearer to the Lord's side. I do love to hear good news from God's people.

Mr. Pinchen. Well, sister Gaines, I've had great opportunities in my

time to study the heart of man. I've attended a great many camp-meetings, revival meetings, protracted meetings, and death-bed scenes, and I am satisfied, sister Gaines, that the heart of man is full of sin, and desperately wicked. This is a wicked world, sister Gaines, a wicked world.

Mrs. G. Were you ever in Arkansas, brother Pinchen? I've been told that the people out there are very ungodly.

Mr. P. Oh, yes, sister Gaines. I once spent a year at Little Rock, and preached in all the towns round about there; and I found some hard cases out there, I can tell you. I was once spending a week in a district where there were a great many horse thieves, and one night, somebody stole my pony. Well, I knowed it was no use to make a fuss, so I told brother Tarbox to say nothing about it, and I'd get my horse by preaching God's everlasting gospel; for I had faith in the truth, and knowed that my Savior would not let me lose my pony. So the next Sunday I preached on horse-stealing, and told the brethren to come up in the evenin' with their hearts filled with the grace of God. So that night the house was crammed brim full with anxious souls, panting for the bread of life. Brother Bingham opened with prayer, and brother Tarbox followed, and I saw right off that we were gwine to have a blessed time. After I got 'em pretty well warmed up, I jumped on to one of the seats, stretched out my hands, and said, "I know who stole my pony; I've found out; and you are in here tryin' to make people believe that you've got religion; but you ain't got it. And if you don't take my horse back to brother Tarbox's pasture this very night, I'll tell your name right out in meetin' to-morrow night. Take my pony back, you vile and wretched sinner, and come up here and give your heart to God." So the next mornin', I went out to brother Tarbox's pasture, and sure enough, there was my bobtail pony. Yes, sister Gaines, there he was, safe and sound. Ha, ha, ha.

Mrs. G. Oh, how interesting, and how fortunate for you to get your pony! And what power there is in the gospel! God's children are very lucky. Oh, it is so sweet to sit here and listen to such good news from God's people! You Hannah, what are you standing there listening for, and neglecting your work? Never mind, my lady, I'll whip you well when I am done here. Go at your work this moment, you lazy huzzy! Never mind,

I'll whip you well. *[Aside.]* Come, do go on, brother Pinchen, with your godly conversation. It is so sweet! It draws me nearer and nearer to the Lord's side.

Mr. P. Well, sister Gaines, I've had some mighty queer dreams in my time, that I have. You see, one night I dreamed that I was dead and in heaven, and such a place I never saw before. As soon as I entered the gates of the celestial empire, I saw many old and familiar faces that I had seen before. The first person that I saw was good old Elder Pike, the preacher that first called my attention to religion. The next person I saw was Deacon Billings, my first wife's father, and then I saw a host of godly faces. Why, sister Gaines, you knowed Elder Goosbee, didn't you?

Mrs. G. Why, yes; did you see him there? He married me to my first husband.

Mr. P. Oh, yes, sister Gaines, I saw the old Elder, and he looked for all the world as if he had just come out of a revival meetin'.

Mrs. G. Did you see my first husband there, brother Pinchen?

Mr. P. No, sister Gaines, I didn't see brother Pepper there; but I've no doubt but that brother Pepper was there.

Mrs. G. Well, I don't know; I have my doubts. He was not the happiest man in the world. He was always borrowing trouble about something or another. Still, I saw some happy moments with Mr. Pepper. I was happy when I made his acquaintance, happy during our courtship, happy a while after our marriage, and happy when he died. *[Weeps.]*

Hannah. Massa Pinchen, did you see my ole man Ben up dar in hebben?

Mr. P. No, Hannah; I didn't go amongst the niggers.

Mrs. G. No, of course brother Pinchen didn't go among the blacks. What are you asking questions for? Never mind, my lady, I'll whip you well when I'm done here. I'll skin you from head to foot. *[Aside.]* Do go on with your heavenly conversation, brother Pinchen; it does my very soul good. This is indeed a precious moment for me. I do love to hear of Christ and Him crucified.

Mr. P. Well, sister Gaines, I promised sister Daniels that I'd come over and see her this morning, and have a little season of prayer with her, and

I suppose I must go. I'll tell you more of my religious experience when I return.

Mrs. G. If you must go, then I'll have to let you; but before you do, I wish to get your advice upon a little matter that concerns Hannah. Last week, Hannah stole a goose, killed it, cooked it, and she and her man Sam had a fine time eating the goose; and her master and I would never have known a word about it, if it had not been for Cato, a faithful servant, who told his master. And then, you see, Hannah had to be severely whipped before she'd confess that she stole the goose. Next Sabbath is sacrament day, and I want to know if you think that Hannah is fit to go to the Lord's supper after stealing the goose.

Mr. P. Well, sister Gaines, that depends on circumstances. If Hannah has confessed that she stole the goose, and has been sufficiently whipped, and has begged her master's pardon, and begged your pardon, and thinks she'll never do the like again, why then I suppose she can go to the Lord's supper; for

> "While the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return."

But she must be sure that she has repented, and won't steal any more.

Mrs. G. Now, Hannah, do you hear that? For my own part, I don't think she's fit to go to the Lord's supper, for she had no occasion to steal the goose. We give our niggers plenty of good wholesome food. They have a full run to the meal tub, meat once a fortnight, and all the sour milk about the place, and I'm sure that's enough for any one. I do think that our niggers are the most ungrateful creatures in the world, that I do. They aggravate my life out of me.

Hannah. I know, missis, dat I steal de goose, and massa whip me for it, and I confess it, and I is sorry for it. But, missis, I is gwine to de Lord's supper, next Sunday, kase I ain't agwine to turn my back on my bressed Lord an' Massa for no old tough goose, dat I ain't. *[Weeps.]*

Mr. P. Well, sister Gaines, I suppose I must go over and see sister Daniels; she'll be waiting for me.

[*Exit* Mr. PINCHEN, M.D.

Mrs. G. Now, Hannah, brother Pinchen is gone, do you get the cowhide and follow me to the cellar, and I'll whip you well for aggravating me as you have to-day. It seems as if I can never sit down to take a little comfort with the Lord, without you crossing me. The devil always puts it into your head to disturb me, just when I am trying to serve the Lord. I've no doubt but that I'll miss going to heaven on your account. But I'll whip you well before I leave this world, that I will. Get the cowhide and follow me to the cellar.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES *and* HANNAH, R.

ACT II.

Scene 1.—PARLOR.

DR. GAINES *at a table, letters and papers before him.*

Enter SAMPEY, L.

Sampey. Dar's a gemman at de doe, massa, dat wants to see you, seer.

Dr. Gaines. Ask him to walk in, Sampey.

[*Exit* SAMPEY, L.

Enter WALKER.[4]

Walker. Why, how do you do, Dr. Gaines? I em glad to see you, I'll swear.

Dr. G. How do you do, Mr. Walker? I did not expect to see you up here so soon. What has hurried you?

4. The character of Walker is presumably based on the slave trader James Walker to whom Brown was hired in 1832. See chapter 1.

Figure 4. James Walker, the slave trader to whom the teenaged Brown was hired out in 1832. Perkins Library, Duke University.

Walk. Well, you see, doctor, I comes when I em not expected. The price of niggers is up, and I em gwine to take advantage of the times. Now, doctor, ef you've got any niggers that you wants to sell, I em your man. I am paying the highest price of any body in the market. I pay cash down, and no grumblin'.

Dr. G. I don't know that I want to sell any of my people now. Still, I've got to make up a little money next month, to pay in bank; and another thing, the doctors say that we are likely to have a touch of the cholera this summer, and if that's the case, I suppose I had better turn as many of my slaves into cash as I can.

Walk. Yes, doctor, that is very true. The cholera is death on slaves, and a thousand dollars in your pocket is a great deal better than a nigger in the field, with cholera at his heels. Why, who is that coming up the lane? It's Mr. Wildmarsh, as I live! Jest the very man I wants to see.

Enter MR. WILDMARSH.

Why, how do you do, Squire? I was jest a thinkin' about you.

Wildmarsh. How are you, Mr. Walker? and how are you, doctor? I am glad to see you both looking so well. You seem in remarkably good health, doctor?

Dr. G. Yes, Squire, I was never in the enjoyment of better health. I hope you left all well at Licking?

Wild. Yes, I thank you. And now, Mr. Walker, how goes times with you?

Walk. Well, you see, Squire, I em in good spirits. The price of niggers is up in the market, and I am lookin' out for bargains; and I was jest intendin' to come over to Lickin' to see you, to see if you had any niggers to sell. But it seems as ef the Lord knowed that I wanted to see you, and directed your steps over here. Now, Squire, ef you've got any niggers you wants to sell, I em your man. I am payin' the highest cash price of any body in the market. Now's your time, Squire.

Wild. No, I don't think I want to sell any of my slaves now. I sold a very valuable gal to Mr. Haskins last week. I tell you, she was a smart one. I got eighteen hundred dollars for her.

Walk. Why, Squire, how you do talk! Eighteen hundred dollars for one gal? She must have been a screamer to bring that price. What sort of a lookin' critter was she? I should like to have bought her.

Wild. She was a little of the smartest gal I've ever raised; that she was.

Walk. Then she was your own raising, was she?

Wild. Oh, yes; she was raised on my place, and if I could have kept her three or four years longer, and taken her to the market myself, I am sure I could have sold her for three thousand dollars. But you see, Mr. Walker, my wife got a little jealous, and you know jealousy sets the women's heads a teetering, and so I had to sell the gal. She's got straight hair, blue eyes, prominent features, and is almost white. Haskins will make a spec, and no mistake.

Walk. Why, Squire, was she that pretty little gal that I saw on your knee the day that your wife was gone, when I was at your place three years ago?

Wild. Yes, the same.

Walk. Well, now, Squire, I thought that was your daughter; she looked mightily like you. She was your daughter, was n't she? You need not be ashamed to own it to me, for I am mum upon such matters.

Wild. You know, Mr. Walker, that people will talk, and when they talk, they say a great deal; and people did talk, and many said the gal was my daughter; and you know we can't help people's talking. But here comes the Rev. Mr. Pinchen; I didn't know that he was in the neighborhood.

Walk. It is Mr. Pinchen, as I live; jest the very man I wants to see.

Enter MR. PINCHEN, R.

Why, how do you do, Mr. Pinchen? What in the name of Jehu brings you down here to Muddy Creek? Any camp-meetins, revival meetins, deathbed scenes, or any thing else in your line going on down here? How is religion prosperin' now, Mr. Pinchen? I always like to hear about religion.

Mr. Pin. Well, Mr. Walker, the Lord's work is in good condition every where now. I tell you, Mr. Walker, I've been in the gospel ministry these thirteen years, and I am satisfied that the heart of man is full of sin and desperately wicked. This is a wicked world, Mr. Walker, a wicked world, and we ought all of us to have religion. Religion is a good thing to live by, and we all want it when we die. Yes, sir, when the great trumpet blows, we ought to be ready. And a man in your business of buying and selling slaves needs religion more than any body else, for it makes you treat your people as you should. Now, there is Mr. Haskins,—he is a slave-trader, like yourself. Well, I converted him. Before he got religion, he was one of the worst men to his niggers I ever saw; his heart was as hard as stone. But religion has made his heart as soft as a piece of cotton. Before I converted him, he would sell husbands from their wives, and seem to take delight in it; but now he won't sell a man from his wife, if he can get any one to buy both of them together. I tell you, sir, religion has done a wonderful work for him.

Walk. I know, Mr. Pinchen, that I ought to have religion, and I feel that I am a great sinner; and whenever I get with good pious people like you and the doctor, and Mr. Wildmarsh, it always makes me feel that I am a desperate sinner. I feel it the more, because I've got a religious turn of mind. I know that I would be happier with religion, and the first

spare time I get, I am going to try to get it. I'll go to a protracted meeting, and I won't stop till I get religion. Yes, I'll scuffle with the Lord till I gets forgiven. But it always makes me feel bad to talk about religion, so I'll change the subject. Now, doctor, what about them thar niggers you thought you could sell me?

Dr. Gaines. I'll see my wife, Mr. Walker, and if she is willing to part with Hannah, I'll sell you Sam and his wife, Hannah. Ah! here comes my wife; I'll mention it.

Enter MRS. GAINES, L.

Ah! my dear, I am glad you've come. I was just telling Mr. Walker, that if you were willing to part with Hannah, I'd sell him Sam and Hannah.

Mrs. G. Now, Dr. Gaines, I am astonished and surprised that you should think of such a thing. You know what trouble I've had in training up Hannah for a house servant, and now that I've got her so that she knows my ways, you want to sell her. Hav n't you niggers enough on the plantation to sell, without selling the servants from under my very nose?

Dr. G. Oh, yes, my dear; but I can spare Sam, and don't like to separate him from his wife; and I thought if you could let Hannah go, I'd sell them both. I don't like to separate husbands from their wives.

Mrs. G. Now, gentlemen, that's just the way with my husband. He thinks more about the welfare and comfort of his slaves, than he does of himself or his family. I am sure you need not feel so bad at the thought of separating Sam from Hannah. They've only been married eight months, and their attachment can't be very strong in that short time. Indeed, I shall be glad if you do sell Sam, for then I'll make Hannah *jump the broomstick* with Cato, and I'll have them both here under my eye.[5] I never will again let one of my house servants marry a field hand — never! For when night comes on, the servants are off to the quarters, and I have

5. Legal marriage among slaves was generally unrecognized. Slave couples commonly adopted the ritual act of jumping over a broomstick as an alternate to a traditional marriage ceremony.

to holler and holler enough to split my throat before I can make them hear. And another thing: I want you to sell Melinda. I don't intend to keep that mulatto wench about the house any longer.

Dr. Gaines. My dear, I'll sell any servant from the place to suit you, except Melinda. I can't think of selling her — I can't think of it.

Mrs. G. I tell you that Melinda shall leave this house, or I'll go. There, now you have it. I've had my life tormented out of me by the presence of that yellow wench, and I'll stand it no longer. I know you love her more than you do me, and I'll — I'll — I'll write — write to my father. *[Weeps.]*

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES, L.

Walk. Why, doctor, your wife's a screamer, ain't she? Ha, ha, ha. Why, doctor, she's got a tongue of her own, ain't she? Why, doctor, it was only last week that I thought of getting a wife myself; but your wife has skeered the idea out of my head. Now, doctor, if you wants to sell the gal, I'll buy her. Husband and wife ought to be on good terms, and your wife won't feel well till the gal is gone. Now, I'll pay you all she's worth, if you wants to sell.

Dr. G. No, Mr. Walker; the girl my wife spoke of is not for sale. My wife does not mean what she says; she's only a little jealous. I'll get brother Pinchen to talk to her, and get her mind turned upon religious matters, and then she'll forget it. She's only a little jealous.

Walk. I tell you what, doctor, ef you call that a little jealous, I'd like to know what's a heap. I tell you, it will take something more than religion to set your wife right. You had better sell me the gal; I'll pay you cash down, and no grumblin'.

Dr. G. The girl is not for sale, Mr. Walker; but if you want two good, able-bodied servants, I'll sell you Sam and Big Sally. Sam is trustworthy, and Sally is worth her weight in gold for rough usage.

Walk. Well, doctor, I'll go out and take a look at 'em, for I never buys slaves without examining them well, because they are sometimes injured by over-work or under-feedin'. I don't say that is the case with yours, for I don't believe it is; but as I sell on honor, I must buy on honor.

Dr. G. Walk out, sir, and you can examine them to your heart's content. Walk right out, sir.

Scene 2.—VIEW IN FRONT OF THE GREAT HOUSE.

Examination of SAM *and* BIG SALLY—DR. GAINES, WILDMARSH, MR. PINCHEN *and* WALKER *present.*

Walk. Well, my boy, what's your name?

Sam. Sam, sir, is my name.

Walk. How old are you, Sam?

Sam. Ef I live to see next corn plantin' time, I'll be 27, or 30, or 35, or 40—I don't know which, sir.

Walk. Ha, ha, ha. Well, doctor, this is rather a green boy. Well, mer feller, are you sound?

Sam. Yes, sir, I spec I is.

Walk. Open your mouth and let me see your teeth. I allers judge a nigger's age by his teeth, same as I dose a hoss. Ah! pretty good set of grinders. Have you got a good appetite?

Sam. Yes, sir.

Walk. Can you eat your allowance?

Sam. Yes, sir, when I can get it.

Walk. Get out on the floor and dance; I want to see if you are supple.

Sam. I don't like to dance; I is got religion.

Walk. Oh, ho! you've got religion, have you? That's so much the better. I likes to deal in the gospel. I think he'll suit me. Now, mer gal, what's your name?

Sally. I is Big Sally, sir.

Walk. How old are you, Sally?

Sally. I don't know, sir; but I heard once dat I was born at sweet pertater diggin' time.

Walk. Ha, ha, ha. Don't know how old you are! Do you know who made you?

Sally. I hev heard who it was in de Bible dat made me, but I dun forget de gentman's name.

Walk. Ha, ha, ha. Well, doctor, this is the greenest lot of niggers I've seen for some time. Well, what do you ask for them?

Dr. Gaines. You may have Sam for $1000, and Sally for $900. They are worth all I ask for them. You know I never banter, Mr. Walker. There they are; you can take them at that price, or let them alone, just as you please.

Walk. Well, doctor, I reckon I'll take 'em; but it's all they are worth. I'll put the handcuffs on 'em, and then I'll pay you. I likes to go accordin' to Scripter. Scripter says ef eatin' meat will offend your brother, you must quit it; and I say, ef leavin' your slaves without the handcuffs will make 'em run away, you must put the handcuffs on 'em. Now, Sam, don't you and Sally cry. I am of a tender heart, and it allers makes me feel bad to see people cryin'. Don't cry, and the first place I get to, I'll buy each of you a great big *ginger cake,*—that I will. Now, Mr. Pinchen, I wish you were going down the river. I'd like to have your company; for I allers likes the company of preachers.

Mr. Pinchen. Well, Mr. Walker, I would be much pleased to go down the river with you, but it's too early for me. I expect to go to Natchez in four or five weeks, to attend a camp-meetin', and if you were going down then, I'd like it. What kind of niggers sells best in the Orleans market, Mr. Walker?

Walk. Why, field hands. Did you think of goin' in the trade?

Mr. P. Oh, no; only it's a long ways down to Natchez, and I thought I'd just buy five or six niggers, and take 'em down and sell 'em to pay my travellin' expenses. I only want to clear my way.

Scene 3.—SITTING-ROOM-TABLE AND ROCKING-CHAIR.

Enter MRS. GAINES, R, *followed by* SAMPEY.

Mrs. Gaines. I do wish your master would come; I want supper. Run to the gate, Sampey, and see if he is coming.

[Exit SAMPEY, L.

That man is enough to break my heart. The patience of an angel could not stand it.

Enter SAMPEY, L.

Samp. Yes, missis, master is coming.

Enter DR. GAINES, L.

[The Doctor walks about with his hands under his coat, seeming very much elated.]

Mrs. Gaines. Why, doctor, what is the matter?

Dr. Gaines. My dear, don't call me *doctor.*

Mrs. G. What should I call you?

Dr. G. Call me Colonel, my dear — Colonel. I have been elected Colonel of the Militia, and I want you to call me by my right name. I always felt that Providence had designed me for something great, and He has just begun to shower His blessings upon me.

Mrs. G. Dear me, I could never get to calling you Colonel; I've called you Doctor for the last twenty years.

Dr. G. Now, Sarah, if you will call me Colonel, other people will, and I want you to set the example. Come, my darling, call me Colonel, and I'll give you any thing you wish for.

Mrs. G. Well, as I want a new gold watch and bracelets, I'll commence now. Come, Colonel, we'll go to supper. Ah! now for my new shawl. [*Aside.*] Mrs. Lemme was here to-day, Colonel, and she had on, Colonel, one of the prettiest shawls, Colonel, I think, Colonel, that I ever saw, Colonel, in my life, Colonel. And there is only one, Colonel, in Mr. Watson's store, Colonel; and that, Colonel, will do, Colonel, for a Colonel's wife.

Dr. G. Ah! my dear, you never looked so much the lady since I've known you. Go, my darling, get the watch, bracelets and shawl, and tell

them to charge them to Colonel Gaines; and when you say "Colonel," always emphasize the word.

Mrs. G. Come, Colonel, let's go to supper.

Dr. G. My dear, you're a jewel,—you are!

[*Exit*, R.

Enter CATO, L.

Cato. Why, whar is massa and missis? I tought dey was here. Ah! by golly, yonder comes a mulatter gal. Yes, it's Mrs. Jones's Tapioca. I'll set up to dat gal, dat I will.

Enter TAPIOCA, R.

Good ebenin', Miss Tappy. How is your folks?

Tapioca. Pretty well, I tank you.

Cato. Miss Tappy, dis wanderin' heart of mine is yours. Come, take a seat! Please to squze my manners; love discommodes me. Take a seat. Now, Miss Tappy, I loves you; an ef you will jess marry me, I'll make you a happy husband, dat I will. Come, take me as I is.

Tap. But what will Big Jim say?

Cato. Big Jim! Why, let dat nigger go to Ginny. I want to know, now, if you is tinkin' about dat common nigger? Why, Miss Tappy, I is surstonished dat you should tink 'bout frowin' yousef away wid a common, ugly lookin' cuss like Big Jim, when you can get a fine lookin', suspectable man like me. Come, Miss Tappy, choose dis day who you have. Afore I go any furder, give me one kiss. Come, give me one kiss. Come, let me kiss you.

Tap. No you shan't—dare now! You shan't kiss me widout you is stronger den I is and I know you is dat. [*He kisses her.*]

Enter DR. GAINES, R, *and hides.*

Cato. Did you know, Miss Tappy, dat I is de head doctor 'bout dis house? I beats de ole boss all to pieces.

Tap. I hev hearn dat you bleeds and pulls teef.

Cato. Yes, Miss Tappy; massa could not get along widout me, for massa was made a doctor by books; but I is a natral doctor. I was born a doctor, jess as Lorenzo Dow was born a preacher.[6] So you see I can't be nuffin' but a doctor, while massa is a bunglin' ole cuss at de bissness.

Dr. Gaines. (in a low voice.) Never mind; I'll teach you a lesson, that I will.

Cato. You see, Miss Tappy, I was gwine to say — Ah! but afore I forget, jess give me anudder kiss, jess to keep company wid de one dat you give me jess now, — dat's all. *[Kisses her.]* Now, Miss Tappy, duse you know de fuss time dat I seed you?

Tap. No, Mr. Cato, I don't.

Cato. Well, it was at de camp-meetin'. Oh, Miss Tappy, dat pretty red calliker dress you had on dat time did de work for me. It made my heart flutter —

Dr. G. (low voice.) Yes, and I'll make your black hide flutter.

Cato. Didn't I hear some noise? By golly, dar is teves in dis house, and I'll drive 'em out. *[Takes a chair and runs at the Doctor, and knocks him down. The Doctor chases Cato round the table.*

Cato. Oh, massa, I didn't know 'twas you!

Dr. G. You scoundrel! I'll whip you well. Stop! I tell you.

[Curtain falls.

ACT III.

Scene 1. — SITTING-ROOM.

MRS. GAINES, *seated in an arm chair, reading a letter.*

6. Lorenzo Dow (1777–1834) was a flamboyant itinerant minister of great celebrity throughout the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. A man of wildly eccentric manner and crusading fervor, he spoke out volubly against the many evils he saw present in his day, including slavery.

Enter HANNAH, *L.*

Mrs. Gaines. You need not tell me, Hannah, that you don't want another husband, I know better. Your master has sold Sam, and he's gone down the river, and you'll never see him again. So, go and put on your calico dress, and meet me in the kitchen. I intend for you to *jump the broomstick* with Cato. You need not tell me that you don't want another man. I know that there's no woman living that can be happy and satisfied without a husband.

Hannah. Oh, missis, I don't want to jump de broomstick wid Cato. I don't love Cato; I can't love him.

Mrs. G. Shut up, this moment! What do you know about love? I didn't love your master when I married him, and people don't marry for love now. So go and put on your calico dress, and meet me in the kitchen.

[*Exit* HANNAH, L.

I am glad that the Colonel has sold Sam; now I'll make Hannah marry Cato, and I have them both here under my eye. And I am also glad that the Colonel has parted with Melinda. Still, I'm afraid that he is trying to deceive me. He took the hussy away yesterday, and says he sold her to a trader; but I don't believe it. At any rate, if she's in the neighborhood, I'll find her, that I will. No man ever fools me.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES, L.

Scene 2.—THE KITCHEN-SLAVES AT WORK.

Enter HANNAH, R.

Hannah. Oh, Cato, do go and tell missis dat you don't want to jump de broomstick wid me,—dat's a good man! Do, Cato; kase I nebber can love you. It was only las week dat massa sold my Sammy, and I don't want any udder man. Do go tell missis dat you don't want me.

Cato. No, Hannah, I ain't a gwine to tell missis no such thing, kase I dose want you, and I ain't a-gwine to tell a lie for you ner nobody else. Dar, now you's got it! I don't see why you need to make so much fuss. I is better lookin' den Sam; an' I is a house servant, an' Sam was only a fiel hand; so you ought to feel proud of a change. So go and do as missis tells you.

[*Exit* HANNAH, L.

Hannah needn't try to get me to tell a lie; I ain't a-gwine to do it, kase I dose want her, an' I is bin wantin' her dis long time, an' soon as massa sold Sam, I knowed I would get her. By golly, I is gwine to be a married man. Won't I be happy! Now, ef I could only jess run away from ole massa, an' get to Canada wid Hannah, den I'd show 'em who I was. Ah! dat reminds me of my song 'bout ole massa and Canada, an' I'll sing it fer yer. Dis is my moriginal hyme. It comed into my head one night when I was fass asleep under an apple tree, looking up at de moon. Now for my song:-

AIR—"Dandy Jim."[7]

Come all ye bondmen far and near,
Let's put a song in massa's ear,
It is a song for our poor race,
Who're whipped and trampled with disgrace.

CHORUS.
My old massa tells me, Oh,
This is a land of freedom, Oh;
Let's look about and see if it's so,
Just as massa tells me, Oh.

7. Neither the melody nor the words are original. Brown is drawing the melody from the well-known minstrel tune "Dandy Jim from Caroline" and the verses from "A Song for Freedom," which he reprinted in *The Anti-Slavery Harp.*

He tells us of that glorious one,
I think his name was Washington,
How he did fight for liberty,
To save a threepence tax on tea. *[Chorus.]*

But now we look about and see
That we poor blacks are not so free;
We're whipped and thrashed about like fools,
And have no chance at common schools.[8] *[Chorus.]*

They take our wives, insult and mock,
And sell our children on the block,
They choke us if we say a word,
And say that "niggers" shan't be heard. *[Chorus.]*

Our preachers, too, with whip and cord,
Command obedience in the Lord;
They say they learn it from the big book,
But for ourselves, we dare not look. [Chorus.]

There is a country far away,
I think they call it Canada,
And if we reach Victoria's shore,
They say that we are slaves no more.[9]

Now haste, all bondmen, let us go,
And leave this *Christian* country, Oh;
Haste to the land of the British Queen,
Where whips for negroes are not seen.

Now, if we go, we must take the night,
And never let them come in sight;

8. Common schools, what we call public schools today, proliferated as state-supported public education expanded rapidly in nineteenth-century America.

9. Canada was part of the British Empire and, as such, still ruled by Queen Victoria. Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833.

The bloodhounds will be on our track,
And wo to us if they fetch us back.
Now haste all bondmen, let us go,
And leave this *Christian* country, Oh;
God help us to Victoria's shore,
Where we are free and slaves no more!

Enter MRS. GAINES, L.

Mrs. Gaines. Ah! Cato, you're ready, are you? Where is Hannah?

Cato. Yes, missis; I is bin waitin' dis long time. Hannah has bin here tryin' to swade me to tell you dat I do n't want her; but I telled her dat you sed I must jump de broomstick wid her, an' I is gwine to mind you.

Mrs. G. That's right, Cato; servants should always mind their masters and mistresses, without asking a question.

Cato. Yes, missis, I allers dose what you and massa tells me, an' axes nobody.

Enter HANNAH, R.

Mrs. Gaines. Ah! Hannah; come, we are waiting for you. Nothing can be done till you come.

Hannah. Oh, missis, I do n't want to jump de broomstick wid Cato; I can't love him.

Mrs. G. Shut up, this moment. Dolly, get the broom. Susan, you take hold of the other end. There, now hold it a little lower — there, a little higher. There, now, that'll do. Now Hannah, take hold of Cato's hand. Let Cato take hold of your hand.

Hannah. Oh, missis, do spare me. I do n't want to jump de broomstick wid Cato.

Mrs. G. Get the cowhide, and follow me to the cellar, and I'll whip you well. I'll let you know how to disobey my orders. Get the cowhide, and follow me to the cellar.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES *and* HANNAH, R.

Dolly. Oh, Cato, do go an' tell missis dat you do n't want Hannah. Do n't you hear how she's whippin' her in de cellar? Do go an' tell missis dat you do n't want Hannah, and den she'll stop whippin' her.

Cato. No, Dolly, I ain't a-gwine to do no such a thing, kase ef I tell missis dat I do n't want Hannah, den missis will whip me; an' I ain't a-gwine to be whipped fer you, ner Hannah, ner nobody else. No, I'll jump de broomstick wid every woman on de place, ef missis wants me to, before I'll be whipped.

Dolly. Cato, ef I was in Hannah's place, I'd see you in de bottomless pit before I'd live wid you, you great big wall-eyed, empty-headed, knock-kneed fool. You're as mean as your devilish old missis.

Cato. Ef you do n't quit dat busin' me, Dolly, I'll tell missis as soon as she comes in, an' she'll whip you, you know she will.

Enter MRS. GAINES *and* HANNAH, R.

[Mrs. G. fans herself with her handkerchief and appears fatigued.]

Mrs. G. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Hannah, to make me fatigue myself in this way, to make you do your duty. It's very naughty in you, Hannah. Now, Dolly, you and Susan get the broom, and get out in the middle of the room. There, hold it a little lower — a little higher; there, that'll do. Now, remember that this is a solemn occasion; you are going to jump into matrimony. Now, Cato, take hold of Hannah's hand. There, now, why could n't you let Cato take hold of your hand before? Now get ready, and when I count three, do you jump. Eyes on the *broomstick!* All ready. One, two, three, and over you go. There, now you're husband and wife, and if you do n't live happy together, it's your own fault; for I am sure there's nothing to hinder it. Now, Hannah, come up to the house, and I'll give you some whiskey, and you can make some apple toddy, and you and Cato can have a fine time.[10]

10. Toddies were popular beverages in the South typically consisting of a mixture of liquor, water, sugar, and spices that was garnished with fruit, heated, and served.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES *and* HANNAH, L.

Dolly. I tell you what, Susan, when I get married, I is gwine to have a preacher to marry me. I ain't a-gwine to jump de broomstick. Dat will do for fiel' hands, but house servants ought to be 'bove dat.

Susan. Well, chile, you can't speck any ting else from ole missis. She come from down in Carlina, from 'mong de poor white trash. She don't know any better. You can't speck nothin' more dan a jump from a frog. Missis says she is one of de akastocacy; but she ain't no more of an akastocacy dan I is. Missis says she was born wid a silver spoon in her mouf; ef she was, I wish it had a-choked her, dat's what I wish. Missis wanted to make Linda jump de broomstick wid Glen, but massa ain't a-gwine to let Linda jump de broomstick wid anybody. He's gwine to keep Linda fer heself.

Dolly. You know massa took Linda 'way las' night, an' tell missis dat he has sold her and sent her down de river; but I do n't b'lieve he has sold her at all. He went ober towards de poplar farm, an' I tink Linda is ober dar now. Ef she is dar, missis'll find it out, fer she tell'd massa las' night, dat ef Linda was in de neighborhood, she'd find her.

[*Exit* DOLLY *and* SUSAN.

Scene 3.—SITTING ROOM—CHAIRS AND TABLE.

Enter HANNAH, R.

Hannah. I do n't keer what missis says; I do n't like Cato, an' I won't live wid him. I always love my Sammy, an' I loves him now. *[Knock at the door—goes to the door.*

Enter MAJ. MOORE, M.D.

Walk in, sir; take a seat. I'll call missis, sir; massa is gone away.

[*Exit* HANNAH, R.

Maj. Moore. So I am here at last, and the Colonel is not at home. I hope his wife is a good-looking woman. I rather like fine-looking women, especially when their husbands are from home. Well, I've studied human nature to some purpose. If you wish to get the good will of a man, do n't praise his wife, and if you wish to gain the favor of a woman, praise her children, and swear that they are the picture of their father, whether they are or not. Ah! here comes the lady.

Enter MRS. GAINES, R.

Mrs. G. Good morning, sir!

Maj. M. Good morning, madam! I am Maj. Moore, of Jefferson. The Colonel and I had seats near each other in the last Legislature.

Mrs. G. Be seated, sir. I think I've heard the Colonel speak of you. He's away, now; but I expect him every moment. You're a stranger here, I presume?

Maj. M. Yes, madam, I am. I rather like the Colonel's situation here.

Mrs. G. It is thought to be a fine location.

Enter SAMPEY, R.

Hand me my fan, will you, Sampey? *[Sampey gets the fan and passes near the Major, who mistakes the boy for the Colonel's son. He reaches out his hand.*

Maj. M. How do you do, bub? Madam, I should have known that this was the Colonel's son, if I had met him in California; for he looks so much like his papa.

Mrs. G. [To the boy.] Get out of here this minute. Go to the kitchen.

[*Exit* SAMPEY, R.

That is one of the niggers, sir.

Maj. M. I beg your pardon, madam; I beg your pardon.

Mrs. G. No offence, sir; mistakes will be made. Ah! here comes the Colonel.

Enter DR. GAINES, M.D.

Dr. Gaines. Bless my soul, how are you, Major? I'm exceedingly pleased to see you. Be seated, be seated, Major.

Mrs. G. Please excuse me, gentlemen; I must go and look after dinner, for I've no doubt that the Major will have an appetite for dinner, by the time it is ready.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES, R.

Maj. M. Colonel, I'm afraid I've played the devil here to-day.

Dr. G. Why, what have you done?

Maj. M. You see, Colonel, I always make it a point, wherever I go, to praise the children, if there are any, and so to-day, seeing one of your little servants come in, and taking him to be your son, I spoke to your wife of the marked resemblance between you and the boy. I am afraid I've insulted madam.

Dr. G. Oh! do n't let that trouble you. Ha, ha, ha. If you did call him my son, you did n't miss it much. Ha, ha, ha. Come, we'll take a walk, and talk over matters about old times.

[*Exit*, L.

Scene 4. — FOREST SCENERY.

Enter GLEN, L.

Glen. Oh, how I want to see Melinda! My heart pants and my soul is moved whenever I hear her voice. Human tongue cannot tell how my heart yearns toward her. Oh, God! thou who gavest me life, and implanted in my bosom the love of liberty, and gave me a heart to love, Oh, pity the poor outraged slave! Thou, who canst rend the veil of centuries, speak, Oh, speak, and put a stop to this persecution! What is death, compared to slavery? Oh, heavy curse, to have thoughts, reason, taste, judgment, conscience and passions like another man, and not have equal liberty to use them! Why was I born with a wish to be free, and still be a slave? Why should I call another man master? And my poor Melinda, she

is taken away from me, and I dare not ask the tyrant where she is. It is childish to stand here weeping. Why should my eyes be filled with tears, when my brain is on fire? I will find my wife — I will; and wo to him who shall try to keep me from her!

Scene 5. — ROOM IN A SMALL COTTAGE ON THE POPLAR FARM,

(Ten miles from Muddy Creek, and owned by Dr. Gaines.)

Enter MELINDA, R.

Melinda. Here I am, watched, and kept a prisoner in this place. Oh, I would that I could escape, and once more get with Glen. Poor Glen! He does not know where I am. Master took the opportunity, when Glen was in the city with his master, to bring me here to this lonely place, and fearing that mistress would know where I was, he brought me here at night. Oh, how I wish I could rush into the arms of sleep! — that sweet sleep, which visits all alike, descending, like the dews of heaven, upon the bond as well as the free. It would drive from my troubled brain the agonies of this terrible night.

Enter DR. GAINES, L.

Dr. Gaines. Good evening, Melinda! Are you not glad to see me?

Melinda. Sir, how can I be glad to see one who has made life a burden, and turned my sweetest moments into bitterness?

Dr. G. Come, Melinda, no more reproaches! You know that I love you, and I have told you, and I tell you again, that if you will give up all idea of having Glen for a husband, I will set you free, let you live in this cottage, and be your own mistress, and I'll dress you like a lady. Come, now, be reasonable!

Melinda. Sir, I am your slave; you can do as you please with the avails of my labor, but you shall never tempt me to swerve from the path of virtue.

Dr. G. Now, Melinda, that black scoundrel Glen has been putting these notions into your head. I'll let you know that you are my property, and I'll do as I please with you. I'll teach you that there is no limit to my power.

Melinda. Sir, let me warn you that if you compass my ruin, a woman's bitterest curse will be laid upon your head, with all the crushing, withering weight that my soul can impart to it; a curse that shall cling to you throughout the remainder of your wretched life; a curse that shall haunt you like a spectre in your dreams by night, and attend upon you by day; a curse, too, that shall embody itself in the ghastly form of the woman whose chastity you will have outraged. Command me to bury myself in yonder stream, and I will obey you. Bid me do any thing else, but I beseech you not to commit a double crime, — outrage a woman, and make her false to her husband.

Dr. G. You got a husband! Who is your husband, and when were you married?

Melinda. Glen is my husband, and I've been married four weeks. Old Uncle Joseph married us one night by moonlight. I see you are angry; I pray you not to injure my husband.

Dr. G. Melinda, you shall never see Glen again. I have bought him from Hamilton, and I will return to Muddy Creek, and roast him at the stake. A black villain, to get into my way in that manner! Here I've come ten miles tonight to see you, and this is the way you receive me!

Melinda. Oh, master, I beg you not to injure my husband! Kill me, but spare him! Do! do! he is my husband!

Dr. G. You shall never see that black imp again, so good night, my lady! When I come again, you'll give me a more cordial reception. Good night!

[*Exit* DR. GAINES, L.

Melinda. I shall go distracted. I cannot remain here and know that Glen is being tortured on my account. I must escape from this place, — I must, — I must!

Enter CATO, R.

Cato. No, you ain't a-gwine to 'scape, nudder. Massa tells me to keep dese eyes on you, an' I is gwine to do it.

Melinda. Oh, Cato, do let me get away! I beg you, do!

Cato. No; I tells you massa telled me to keep you safe; an' ef I let you go, massa will whip me.

[*Exit* CATO, L.

Enter MRS. GAINES, R.

Mrs. G. Ah, you trollop! here you are! Your master told me that he had sold you and sent you down the river, but I knew better; I knew it was a lie. And when he left home this evening, he said he was going to the city on business, and I knew that was a lie too, and determined to follow him, and see what he was up to. I rode all the way over here to-night. My side-saddle was lent out, and I had to ride ten miles bare-back, and I can scarcely walk; and your master has just left here. Now deny that, if you dare.

Melinda. Madam, I will deny nothing which is true. Your husband has just gone from here, but God knows that I am innocent of any thing wrong with him.

Mrs. G. It's a lie! I know better. If you are innocent, what are you doing here, cooped up in this cottage by yourself? Tell me that!

Melinda. God knows that I was brought here against my will, and I beg that you will take me away.

Mrs. G. Yes, Melinda, I will see that you are taken away, but it shall be after a fashion that you won't like. I know that your master loves you, and I intend to put a stop to it. Here, drink the contents of this vial,—drink it!

Melinda. Oh, you will not take my life,—you will not!

Mrs. G. Drink the poison this moment!

Melinda. I cannot drink it.

Mrs. G. I tell you to drink this poison at once. Drink it, or I will thrust this knife to your heart! The poison or the dagger, this instant! *[She*

draws a dagger; Melinda retreats to the back of the room, and seizes a broom.

Melinda. I will not drink the poison! *[They fight;* MELINDA *sweeps off* MRS. GAINES,—*cap, combs and curls.*

Curtain falls.

ACT IV.

Scene 1.—INTERIOR OF A DUNGEON—GLEN IN CHAINS

Glen. When I think of my unmerited sufferings, it almost drives me mad. I struck the doctor, and for that, I must remain here loaded with chains. But why did he strike me? He takes my wife from me, sends her off, and then comes and beats me over the head with his cane. I did right to strike him back again. I would I had killed him. Oh! there is a volcano pent up in the hearts of the slaves of these Southern States that will burst forth ere long. When that day comes, wo to those whom its unpitying fury may devour! I would be willing to die, if I could smite down with these chains every man who attempts to enslave his fellow-man.

Enter SAMPEY, *R.*

Sampey. Glen, I jess bin hear massa call de oberseer, and I spec somebody is gwine to be whipped. Anudder ting: I know whar massa took Linda to. He took her to de poplar farm, an' he went away las' night, an' missis she follow after massa, an' she ain't come back yet. I tell you, Glen, de debil will be to pay on dis place, but don't you tell any body dat I tole you.

[*Exit* SAMPEY, R.

Scene 2.—PARLOR.

DR. GAINES, *alone.*

Dr. Gaines. Yes, I will have the black rascal well whipped, and then I'll sell him. It was most fortunate for me that Hamilton was willing to sell him to me.

Enter MR. SCRAGG, L.

I have sent for you, Mr. Scragg. I want you to take Glen out of the dungeon, take him into the tobacco house, fasten him down upon the stretcher, and give him five hundred lashes upon his bare back; and when you have whipped him, feel his pulse, and report to me how it stands, and if he can bear more, I'll have you give him an additional hundred or two, as the case may be.[11]

Scragg. I tell you, doctor, that suits me to a charm. I've long wanted to whip that nigger. When your brother-in-law came here to board, and brought that boy with him, I felt bad to see a nigger dressed up in such fine clothes, and I wanted to whip him right off. I tell you, doctor, I had rather whip that nigger than go to heaven, any day,—that I had!

Dr. G. Go, Mr. Scragg, and do your duty. Don't spare the whip!

Scragg. I will, sir; I'll do it in order.

[*Exit* SCRAGG, L.

Dr. G. Every thing works well now, and when I get Glen out of the way, I'll pay Melinda another visit, and she'll give me a different reception. But I wonder where my wife is? She left word that she was going to see her brother, but I am afraid that she has got on my track. That woman is the pest of my life. If there's any place in heaven for her, I'd be glad if the Lord would take her home, for I've had her too long already. But what noise is that? What can that be? What is the matter?

Enter SCRAGG, L., *with face bloody.*

11. Even by customary standards of slave punishment, five hundred or more lashes was a grossly exaggerated number, as likely to maim or kill as to "correct."

Scragg. Oh, dear me! oh, my head! That nigger broke away from me, and struck me over the head with a stick. Oh, dear me! Oh!

Dr. G. Where is he, Mr. Scragg?

Scragg. Oh! sir, he jumped out of the window; he's gone. Oh! my head; he's cracked my skull. Oh, dear me, I'm kilt! Oh! oh! oh!

Enter SLAVES, R.

Dr. G. Go, Dolly, and wash Mr. Scragg's head with some whiskey, and bind it up. Go at once. And Bob, you run over to Mr. Hall, and tell him to come with his hounds; we must go after the rascal.

[*Exit all except the* DOCTOR, R.

This will never do. When I catch the scoundrel, I'll make an example of him; I'll whip him to death. Ah! here comes my wife. I wonder what she comes now for? I must put on a sober face, for she looks angry.

Enter MRS. GAINES, L.

Ah! my dear, I am glad you've come, I've been so lonesome without you. Oh! Sarah, I do n't know what I should do if the Lord should take you home to heaven. I do n't think that I should be able to live without you.

Mrs. G. Dr. Gaines, you ought to be ashamed to sit there and talk in that way. You know very well that if the Lord should call me home to glory to-night, you'd jump for joy. But you need not think that I am going to leave this world before you. No; with the help of the Lord, I'll stay here to foil you in your meanness. I've been on your track, and a dirty track it is, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. See what promises you made me before we were married; and this is the way you keep your word. When I married you, every body said that it was a pity that a woman of my sweet temper should be linked to such a man as you. *[She weeps and wrings her hands.*

Dr. G. Come, my dear, do n't make a fool of yourself. Come, let's go to supper, and a strong cup of tea will help your head.

Mrs. G. Tea help my head! tea won't help my head. You're a brute of a man; I always knew I was a fool for marrying you. There was Mr. Comstock, he wanted me, and he loved me, and he said I was an angel, so he did; and he loved me, and he was rich; and mother always said that he loved me more than you, for when he used to kiss me, he always squeezed my hand. You never did such a thing in your life. *[She weeps and wrings her hands.*

Dr. G. Come, my dear, do n't act so foolish.

Mrs. G. Yes; every thing I do is foolish. You're a brute of a man; I won't live with you any longer. I'll leave you — that I will. I'll go and see a lawyer, and get a divorce from you — so I will.

Dr. G. Well, Sarah, if you want a divorce, you had better engage Mr. Barker. He's the best lawyer in town; and if you want some money to facilitate the business, I'll draw a check for you.

Mrs. G. So you want me to get a divorce, do you? Well, I won't have a divorce; no, I'll never leave you, as long as the Lord spares me.

[*Exit* MRS. GAINES, R.

Scene 3. — FOREST AT NIGHT — LARGE TREE.

Enter MELINDA, L.

Melinda. This is indeed a dark night to be out and alone on this road. But I must find my husband, I must. Poor Glen! if he only knew that I was here, and could get to me, he would. What a curse slavery is! It separates husbands from their wives, and tears mothers from their helpless offspring, and blights all our hopes for this world. I must try to reach Muddy Creek before daylight, and seek out my husband. What's that I hear? — footsteps? I'll get behind this tree.

Enter GLEN, R.

Glen. It is so dark, I'm afraid I've missed the road. Still, this must be the right way to the poplar farm. And if Bob told me the truth, when he said that Melinda was at the poplar farm, I will soon be with her; and if I

once get her in my arms, it will be a strong man that shall take her from me. Aye, a dozen strong men shall not be able to wrest her from my arms. *[Melinda rushes from behind the tree.*

Melinda. Oh, Glen! It is my husband,—it is!

Glen. Melinda! Melinda! it is, it is. Oh God! I thank Thee for this manifestation of Thy kindness. Come, come, Melinda, we must go at once to Canada. I escaped from the overseer, whom Dr. Gaines sent to flog me. Yes, I struck him over the head with his own club, and I made the wine flow freely; yes, I pounded his old skillet well for him, and then jumped out of the window. It was a leap for freedom. Yes, Melinda, it was a leap for freedom. I've said "master" for the last time. I am free; I'm bound for Canada. Come, let's be off, at once, for the negro dogs will be put upon our track. Let us once get beyond the Ohio river, and all will be right.

[*Exit* R.

ACT V.

Scene 1.—BAR-ROOM IN THE AMERICAN HOTEL—TRAVELERS LOUNGING IN CHAIRS, AND AT THE BAR.

Enter BILL JENNINGS, R.

Barkeeper. Why, Jennings, how do you do?

Jennings. Say Mr. Jennings, if you please.

Barkeeper: Well, Mr. Jennings, if that suits you better. How are times? We've been expecting you, for some days.

Jennings. Well, before I talk about the times, I want my horses put up, and want you to tell me where my niggers are to stay to-night. Sheds, stables, barns, and every thing else here, seems pretty full, if I am a judge.

Barkeeper. Oh! I'll see to your plunder.

1st Lounger: I say, Barkeeper, make me a brandy cock-tail, strong. Why, how do you do, Mr. Jennings?

Jennings. Pretty well, Mr. Peters. Cold evening, this.

1st Loun. Yes, this is cold. I heard you speak of your niggers. Have you got a pretty large gang?

Jennings. No, only thirty-three. But they are the best that the country can afford. I shall clear a few dimes, this trip. I hear that the price is up.

Enter MR. WHITE, R.

White. Can I be accommodated here to-night, landlord?

Barkeeper. Yes, sir; we've bed for man and beast. Go, Dick, and take the gentleman's coat and hat. *[To the waiter.]* You're a stranger in these parts, I rec'on.

White. Yes, I am a stranger here.

2d Loun. Where mout you come from, ef it's a far question?

White. I am from Massachusetts.

3d Loun. I say, cuss Massachusetts![12]

1st Loun. I say so too. There is where the fanatics live; cussed traitors. The President ought to hang 'em all.

White. I say, landlord, if this is the language that I am to hear, I would like to go into a private room.

Barkeeper. We ain't got no private room empty.

1st. Loun. Maybe you're mad 'bout what I said 'bout your State. Ef you is, I've only to say that this is a free country, and people talks what they please; an' ef you do n't like it, you can better yourself.

White. Sir, if this is a free country, why do you have slaves here? I saw a gang at the door, as I came in.

2d Loun. He did n't mean that this was a free country for niggers. He meant that it's free for white people. And another thing, ef you get to talking 'bout freedom for niggers, you'll catch what you won't like, mister. It's right for niggers to be slaves.

White. But I saw some white slaves.

12. This person is expressing the common proslavery aspersion against Massachusetts as a bastion of abolitionism.

1st Loun. Well, they're white niggers.

White. Well, sir, I am from a free State, and I thank God for it; for the worst act that a man can commit upon his fellow-man, is to make him a slave. Conceive of a mind, a living soul, with the germs of faculties which infinity cannot exhaust, as it first beams upon you in its glad morning of existence, quivering with life and joy, exulting in the glorious sense of its developing energies, beautiful, and brave, and generous, and joyous, and free,—the clear pure spirit bathed in the auroral light of its unconscious immortality,—and then follow it in its dark and dreary passage through slavery, until oppression stifles and kills, one by one, every inspiration and aspiration of its being, until it becomes a dead soul entombed in a living frame!

3d Loun. Stop that; stop that, I say. That's treason to the country; that's downright rebellion.

Barkeeper. Yes, it is. And another thing,—this is not a meeting-house.

1st Loun. Yes, if you talk such stuff as that, you'll get a chunk of cold lead in you, that you will.

Enter DR. GAINES *and* SCRAGG, *followed by* CATO, R.

Dr. G. Gentlemen, I am in pursuit of two valuable slaves, and I will pay five hundred dollars for their arrest.

[*Exit* MR. WHITE, L.

1st Loun. I'll bet a picayune that your niggers have been stolen by that cussed feller from Massachusetts.[13] Don't you see he's gone?

Dr. G. Where is the man? If I can lay my hands on him, he'll never steal another nigger. Where is the scoundrel?

1st Loun. Let's go after the feller. I'll go with you. Come, foller me.

[*Exit all,* L., *except* CATO *and the waiter.*

13. The picayune was a coin of small denomination. A term of Spanish derivation, it reflected an earlier time of transatlantic Spanish power when its currency was the international standard of measurement.

Cato. Why don't you bring in massa's saddle-bags? What de debil you standin' dar for? You common country niggers do n't know nuffin', no how. Go an' get massa's saddle-bags, and bring 'em in.

[*Exit* SERVANT, R.

By golly! ebry body's gone, an' de bar-keeper too. I'll tend de bar myself now; an' de fuss gemman I waits on will be dis gemman of color. *[Goes behind the counter, and drinks.]* Ah, dis is de stuff fer me; it makes my head swim; it makes me happy right off. I'll take a little more.

Enter BARKEEPER, L.

Barkeeper. What are you doing behind that bar, you black cuss?

Cato. I is lookin' for massa's saddle-bags, sir. Is dey here?

Barkeeper. But what were you drinking there?

Cato. Me drinkin'! Why, massa, you muss be mistaken. I ain't drink nuffin'.

Barkeeper. You infernal whelp, to stand there and lie in that way!

Cato. Oh, yes, seer, I did tase dat coffee in dat bottle; dat's all I did.

Enter MR. WHITE, L., *excited.*

Mr. White. I say, sir, is there no place of concealment in your house? They are after me, and my life is in danger. Say, sir, can't you hide me away?

Barkeeper. Well, you ought to hold your tongue when you come into our State.

Mr. White. But, sir, the Constitution gives me the right to speak my sentiments, at all times and in all places.

Barkeeper. We don't care for Constitutions nor nothin' else. We made the Constitution, and we'll break it. But you had better hide away; they are coming, and they'll lynch you, that they will. Come with me; I'll hide you in the cellar. Foller me.

[*Exit* BARKEEPER *and* WHITE, L.

Enter the MOB, R.

Dr. Gaines. If I can once lay my hands on that scoundrel, I'll blow a hole through his head.

Jennings. Yes, I say so too; for no one knows whose niggers are safe, now-a-days. I must look after my niggers. Who is that I see in the distance? I believe it's that cussed Massachusetts feller. Come, let's go after him.

[*Exit* the MOB, R.

Scene 2.—FOREST AT NIGHT.

Enter GLEN *and* MELINDA, R.

Melinda. I am so tired and hungry, that I cannot go further. It is so cloudy that we cannot see the North Star, and therefore cannot tell whether we are going to Canada, or further South. Let's sit down here.

Glen. I know that we cannot see the North Star, Melinda, and I fear we've lost our way. But, see! the clouds are passing away, and it'll soon be clear. See! yonder is a star; yonder is another and another. Ah! yonder is the North Star, and we are safe!

"Star of the North! though night winds drift
The fleecy drapery of the sky
Between thy lamp and me, I lift,
Yea, lift with hope my sleepless eye,
To the blue heights wherein thou dwellest,
And of a land of freedom tellest.

"Star of the North! while blazing day
Pours round me its full tide of light,
And hides thy pale but faithful ray,
I, too, lie hid, and long for night:
For night: I dare not walk at noon,
Nor dare I trust the faithless moon—

"Nor faithless man, whose burning lust
For gold hath riveted my chain,—
Nor other leader can I trust
But thee, of even the starry train;
For all the host around thee burning,
Like faithless man, keep turning, turning.

"I may not follow where they go:—
Star of the North! I look to thee
While on I press; for well I know,
Thy light and truth shall set me free:—
Thy light, that no poor slave deceiveth;
Thy truth, that all my soul believeth.

"Thy beam is on the glassy breast
Of the still spring, upon whose brink
I lay my weary limbs to rest,
And bow my parching lips to drink.
Guide of the friendless negro's way,
I bless thee for this quiet ray!

"In the dark top of southern pines
I nestled, when the Driver's horn
Called to the field, in lengthening lines,
My fellows, at the break of morn.
And there I lay till thy sweet face
Looked in upon 'my hiding place.'

"The tangled cane-brake, where I crept
For shelter from the heat of noon,
And where, while others toiled, I slept,
Till wakened by the rising moon,
As its stalks felt the night wind free,
Gave me to catch a glimpse of thee.

"Star of the North! in bright array
The constellations round thee sweep,
Each holding on its nightly way,
Rising, or sinking in the deep,
And, as it hangs in mid heaven flaming,
The homage of some nation claiming.

"*This* nation to the Eagle cowers;
Fit ensign! she's a bird of spoil:—
Like worships like! for each devours
The earnings of another's toil.
I've felt her talons and her beak,
And now the gentler Lion seek.

"The Lion, at the Monarch's feet
Crouches, and lays his mighty paw
Into her lap!—an emblem meet
Of England's Queen, and English law:
Queen, that hath made her Islands free!
Law, that holds out its shield to me!

"Star of the North! upon that shield
Thou shinest,—Oh, for ever shine!
The negro, from the cotton field
Shall, then, beneath its orb recline,
And feed the Lion, couched before it,
Nor heed the Eagle, screaming o'er it!"[14]

With the thoughts of servitude behind us, and the North Star before us, we will go forward with cheerful hearts. Come, Melinda, let's go on.

[*Exit*, L.

14. Brown reprints the entirety of the well-known antislavery poem "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe to the North Star," by John Pierpont (1785–1866).

Scene 3.—A STREET.

Enter MR. WHITE, R.

Mr. White. I am glad to be once more in a free State. If I am caught again south of Mason and Dixon's line, I'll give them leave to lynch me. I came near losing my life. This is the way our constitutional rights are trampled upon. But what care these men about Constitutions, or any thing else that does not suit them? But I must hasten on.

[*Exit*, L.

Enter CATO, *in disguise*, R.

Cato. I wonder ef dis is me? By golly, I is free as a frog. But maybe I is mistaken; maybe dis ain't me. Cato, is dis you? Yes, seer. Well, now it is me, an' I em a free man. But, stop! I muss change my name, kase ole massa might foller me, and somebody might tell him dat dey seed Cato; so I'll change my name, and den he won't know me ef he sees me. Now, what shall I call myself? I'm now in a suspectable part of de country, an' I muss have a suspectable name. Ah! I'll call myself Alexander Washington Napoleon Pompey Caesar. Dar, now, dat's a good long, suspectable name, and every body will suspect me. Let me see; I wonder ef I can't make up a song on my escape? I'll try.

AIR—"Dearest Mae."

Now, freemen, listen to my song, a story I'll relate,
It happened in de valley of de ole Kentucky State:
Dey marched me out into de fiel', at every break of day,
And work me dar till late sunset, widout a cent of pay.

Chorus.—Dey work me all de day,
Widout a bit of pay,
And thought, because dey fed me well,
I would not run away.

Massa gave me his ole coat, an' thought I'd happy be,
But I had my eye on de North Star, an' thought of liberty;
Ole massa lock de door, an' den he went to sleep,
I dress myself in his bess clothes, an' jump into de street.

Chorus. — Dey work me all de day,
Widout a bit of pay,
So I took my flight, in the middle of de night,
When de sun was gone away.

Sed I, dis chile's a freeman now, he'll be a slave no more;
I travell'd faster all dat night, dan I ever did before.
I came up to a farmer's house, jest at de break of day,
And saw a white man standin' dar, sed he, "You are a runaway."

Chorus. — Dey work me all de day, &c.

I tole him I had left de whip, an' bayin' of de hound,
To find a place where man is man, ef sich dar can be found;
Dat I had heard, in Canada, dat all mankind are free,
An' dat I was going dar in search of liberty.

Chorus. — Dey work me all de day, &c.

I've not committed any crime, why should I run away?
Oh! shame upon your laws, dat drive me off to Canada.
You loudly boast of liberty, an' say your State is free,
But ef I tarry in your midst, will you protect me?

Chorus. — Dey work me all de day, &c.[15]

[*Exit*, L.

Scene 4. — DINING-ROOM. — TABLE SPREAD.

MRS. NEAL *and* CHARLOTTE.

15. The melody of "Dearest Mae" was in widespread circulation at the time, but the words were presumably written by Brown.

Mrs. Neal. Thee may put the tea to draw, Charlotte.[16] Thy father will be in soon, and we must have breakfast.

Enter MR. NEAL, L.

I think, Simeon, it is time those people were called. Thee knows that they may be pursued, and we ought not to detain them long here.

Mr. Neal. Yes, Ruth, thou art right. Go, Charlotte, and knock on their chamber door, and tell them that breakfast is ready.

[*Exit* CHARLOTTE, R.

Mrs. N. Poor creatures! I hope they'll reach Canada in safety. They seem to be worthy persons.

Enter CHARLOTTE, *R.*

Charlotte. I've called them, mother, and they'll soon be down. I'll put the breakfast on the table.

Enter NEIGHBOR JONES, L.

Mr. N. Good morning, James. Thee has heard, I presume, that we have two very interesting persons in the house?

Jones. Yes, I heard that you had two fugitives by the Underground road, last night; and I've come over to fight for them, if any persons come to take them back.

Enter THOMAS, R.

Mr. N. Go, Thomas, and harness up the horses and put them to the covered wagon, and be ready to take these people on, as soon as they get their breakfast. Go, Thomas, and hurry thyself.

[*Exit* THOMAS, R.

16. The Neal family's usage of *thee* and *thy* for second-person pronominal reference marks them as Quakers. Brown's respect for Quakers as antislavery activists owed in large part to the protection and hospitality afforded him during his escape by the Quaker family of Wells Brown (see chapter 1).

And so thee wants to fight, this morning, James?

Jones. Yes; as you belongs to a society that don't believe in fighting, and I does believe in that sort of thing, I thought I'd come and relieve you of that work, if there is any to be done.[17]

Enter GLEN *and* MELINDA, R.

Mr. N. Good morning, friends. I hope thee rested well, last night.

Mrs. N. Yes, I hope thee had a good night's rest.

Glen. I thank you, madam, we did.

Mr. N. I'll introduce thee to our neighbor, James Jones. He's a staunch friend of thy people.

Jones. I am glad to see you. I've come over to render assistance, if any is needed.

Mrs. N. Come, friends, take seats at the table. Thee'll take seats there. *[To* GLEN *and* MELINDA.] *[All take seats at the table.]* Does thee take sugar and milk in thy tea?

Melinda. I thank you, we do.

Jones. I'll look at your *Tribune*, Uncle Simeon, while you're eating.

Mr. N. Thee'll find it on the table.

Mrs. N. I presume thee's anxious to get to thy journey's end?

Glen. Yes, madam, we are. I am told that we are not safe in any of the free States.

Mr. N. I am sorry to tell thee, that that is too true. Thee will not be safe until thee gets on British soil. I wonder what keeps Thomas; he should have been here with the team.

Enter THOMAS, L.

Thomas. All's ready; and I've written the prettiest song that was ever sung. I call it "The Underground Railroad."

Mr. N. Thomas, thee can eat thy breakfast far better than thee can write a song, as thee calls it. Thee must hurry thyself, when I send thee for the horses, Thomas. Here lately, thee takes thy time.

17. Quaker theology mandated pacifism.

Thomas. Well, you see I've been writing poetry; that's the reason I've been so long. If you wish it, I'll sing it to you.

Jones. Do let us hear the song.

Mrs. Neal. Yes, if Thomas has written a ditty, do let us hear it.

Mr. Neal. Well, Thomas, if thee has a ditty, thee may recite it to us.

Thomas. Well, I'll give it to you. Remember that I call it, "The Underground Railroad."

AIR—"Wait for the Wagon."

Oh, where is the invention
Of this growing age,
Claiming the attention
Of statesman, priest, or sage,
In the many railways
Through the nation found,
Equal to the Yankees'
Railway under-ground?

Chorus.—No one hears the whistle,
Or rolling of the cars,
While negroes ride to freedom
Beyond the stripes and stars.

On the Southern borders
Are the Railway stations,
Negroes get free orders
While on the plantations;
For all, of ev'ry color,
First-class cars are found,
While they ride to freedom
By Railway under-ground.

Chorus.—No one hears the whistle, &c.

Masters in the morning
Furiously rage,

Cursing the inventions
Of this knowing age;
Order out the bloodhounds,
Swear they'll bring them back,
Dogs return exhausted,
Cannot find the track.

Chorus.—No one hears the whistle, &c.

Travel is increasing,
Build a double track,
Cars and engines wanted,
They'll come, we have no lack.
Clear the track of loafers,
See that crowded car!
Thousands passing yearly,
Stock is more than par.

Chorus.—No one hears the whistle, &c.

Jones. Well done! That's a good song. I'd like to have a copy of them verses. [*Knock at the door. Charlotte goes to the door, and returns.*

Enter CATO, L., *still in disguise.*

Mr. Neal. Who is this we have? Another of the outcasts, I presume?

Cato. Yes, seer; I is gwine to Canada, an' I met a man, an' he tole me dat you would give me some wittals an' help me on de way. By golly! ef dar ain't Glen an' Melinda. Dey do n't know me in dese fine clothes. [*Goes up to them.*] Ah, chillen! I is one wid you. I golly, I is here too! [*They shake hands.*]

Glen. Why, it is Cato, as I live!

Melinda. Oh, Cato, I am so glad to see you! But how did you get here?

Cato. Ah, chile, I come wid ole massa to hunt you; an' you see I get tired huntin' you, an' I am now huntin' for Canada. I leff de ole boss in de bed at de hotel; an' you see I thought, afore I left massa, I'd jess change

clothes wid him; so, you see, I is fixed up,—ha, ha, ha. Ah, chillen! I is gwine wid you.

Mrs. Neal. Come, sit thee down, and have some breakfast.

Cato. Tank you, madam, I'll do dat. *[Sits down and eats.*

Mr. Neal. This is pleasant for thee to meet one of thy friends.

Glen. Yes, sir, it is; I would be glad if we could meet more of them. I have a mother and sister still in slavery, and I would give worlds, if I possessed them, if by so doing I could release them from their bondage.

Thomas. We are all ready, sir, and the wagon is waiting.

Mrs. Neal. Yes, thee had better start.

Cato. Ef any body tries to take me back to ole massa, I'll pull ebry toof out of dar heads, dat I will! As soon as I get to Canada, I'll set up a doctor shop, an' won't I be poplar? Den I rec'on I will. I'll pull teef fer all de people in Canada. Oh, how I wish I had Hannah wid me! It makes me feel bad when I tink I ain't a-gwine to see my wife no more. But, come, chillen, let's be makin' tracks. Dey say we is most to de British side.

Mr. Neal. Yes, a few miles further, and you'll be safe beyond the reach of the Fugitive-Slave Law.[18]

Cato. Ah, dat's de talk fer dis chile.

[*Exit,* M.D.

Scene 5.—THE NIAGARA RIVER—A FERRY

FERRYMAN, *fastening his small boat.*

Ferryman, [advancing, takes out his watch.] I swan, if it ain't one o'clock. I thought it was dinner time. Now there's no one here, I'll go to dinner, and if any body comes, they can wait until I return. I'll go at once.

18. The Fugitive Slave Act, which compelled the return of slaves to their owners, remained in effect until the Civil War even in nonslaveholding states. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution officially annulled the law in 1865, although as early as March 1862 Union army officers were ordered not to return fugitive slaves.

[*Exit*, L.

Enter MR. WHITE, R., *with an umbrella.*

Mr. White. I wonder where that ferryman is? I want to cross to Canada. It seems a little showery, or else the mist from the Falls is growing thicker. *[Takes out his sketch-book and pencils, — sketches.*[19]

Enter CANE PEDLAR, R.

Pedlar. Want a good cane to-day, sir? Here's one from Goat Island, — very good, sir, — straight and neat, — only one dollar. I've a wife and nine small children, — youngest is nursing, and the oldest only three years old. Here's a cane from Table Rock, sir.[20] Please buy one! I've had no breakfast today. My wife's got the rheumatics, and the children's got the measles. Come, sir, do buy a cane! I've a lame shoulder, and can't work.

Mr. White. Will you stop your confounded talk, and let me alone? Don't you see that I am sketching? You've spoiled a beautiful scene for me, with your nonsense.

Enter 2d PEDLAR, R.

2d Pedlar. Want any bead bags, or money purses? These are all real Ingen bags, made by the Black Hawk Ingens. Here's a pretty bag, sir, only 75 cents. Here's a money purse, 50 cents. Please, sir, buy something! My wife's got the fever and ague, and the house is full of children, and they're all sick. Come, sir, do help a worthy man!

Mr. White. Will you hold your tongue? You've spoiled some of the finest pictures in the world. Don't you see that I am sketching?

[*Exit* PEDLARS, R., *grumbling.*

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19. White has set up his equipment for sketching the falls at a favorable point on the U.S. side of the Niagara River, the international border. Sketches and paintings of the falls were common in the 1840s and 1850s, as Niagara became a popular tourist destination.

20. Goat Island is a small island on the Niagara River below the falls; Table Rock is an outcropping of rock on the Canadian side affording good views of the falls.

I am glad those fellows have gone; now I'll go a little further up the shore, and see if I can find another boat. I want to get over.

[*Exit*, L.

Enter DR. GAINES, SCRAGG, *and an* OFFICER.[21]

Officer. I do n't think that your slaves have crossed yet, and my officers will watch the shore below here, while we stroll up the river. If I once get my hands on them, all the Abolitionists in the State shall not take them from me.

Dr. G. I hope they have not got over, for I would not lose them for two thousand dollars, especially the gal.

Enter 1st PEDLAR.

Pedlar. Wish to get a good cane, sir? This stick was cut on the very spot where Sam Patch jumped over the falls.[22] Only fifty cents. I have a sick wife and thirteen children. Please buy a cane; I ain't had no dinner.

Officer. Get out of the way! Gentlemen, we'll go up the shore.

[*Exit*, L.

Enter CATO, R.

Cato. I is loss fum de cumpny, but dis is de ferry, and I spec dey'll soon come. But did n't we have a good time las' night in Buffalo? Dem dar Buffalo gals make my heart flutter, dat dey did. But, tanks be to de Lord, I is got religion. I got it las' night in de meetin'. Before I got religion, I was a great sinner; I got drunk, an' took de name of de Lord in vain. But now I is a conwerted man; I is bound for hebben; I toats de witness in

21. In attempting to track down his fugitive slaves in the free states of the North, Dr. Gaines resorts to Southern slaveholders' usual procedure of enlisting help from local constables.

22. Sam Patch (1807–29) was one of the earliest American daredevils. He leaped over the Passaic Falls near Paterson, New Jersey, in 1827. He surpassed that feat in October 1829 by becoming the first person successfully to leap over Niagara Falls but died the next month while attempting to jump the Upper Falls of the Genesee River near Rochester, New York.

my bosom; I feel dat my name is rote in de book of life. But dem niggers in de Vine Street Church las' night shout an' make sich a fuss, dey give me de headache.[23] But, tank de Lord, I is got religion, an' now I'll be a preacher, and den dey'll call me de Rev. Alexander Washinton Napoleon Pompey Caesar. Now I'll preach and pull teef, bofe at de same time. Oh, how I wish I had Hannah wid me! Cuss ole massa, fer ef it warn't for him, I could have my wife wid me. Ef I had n't religion, I'd say "Damn ole massa!" but as I is a religious man, an' belongs to de church, I won't say no sich a thing. But who is dat I see comin'? Oh, it's a whole heap of people. Good Lord! what is de matter?

Enter GLEN *and* MELINDA, L., *followed by* OFFICERS.

Glen. Let them come; I am ready for them. He that lays hands on me or my wife shall feel the weight of this club.

Melinda. Oh, Glen, let's die here, rather than again go into slavery.

Officer. I am the United States Marshal. I have a warrant from the Commissioner to take you, and bring you before him. I command assistance.

Enter DR. GAINES, SCRAGG, *and* OFFICER, R.

Dr. Gaines. Here they are. Down with the villain! down with him! but do n't hurt the gal!

Enter MR. WHITE, R.

Mr. White. Why, bless me! these are the slaveholding fellows. I'll fight for freedom! *[Takes hold of his umbrella with both hands.—The fight commences, in which* GLEN, CATO, DR. GAINES, SCRAGG, WHITE, *and the* OFFICERS, *take part.*—FERRYMAN *enters, and runs to his boat.*—DR. GAINES, SCRAGG *and the* OFFICERS *are knocked down,*

23. This reference to the Vine Street African Methodist Episcopal Church of Buffalo was something of a private joke for Brown. Since its founding in 1831, it served as a central meeting place for local and regional African American activities, including antislavery. Brown was at home in the church from his years of residence in the city.

GLEN, MELINDA *and* CATO *jump into the boat, and as it leaves the shore and floats away,* GLEN *and* CATO *wave their hats, and shout loudly for freedom.—Curtain falls.*

THE END.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

The following are but few of the favorable notices given of "THE ESCAPE," where it has been publicly read:

A novel Dramatic Reading took place last evening at Sansom Street Hall, by WM. WELLS BROWN, the colored dramatic writer, which was highly entertaining, and gave the greatest satisfaction to an intelligent and appreciative audience. The Drama is instructive, as well as very laughable.—*Philadelphia Evening Bulletin.*

All who heard MR. BROWN'S Drama were highly gratified. It is well executed, and was finely delivered.—*Philadelphia Morning Times.*

The Dramatic Reading of Mr. WM. WELLS BROWN, last evening, was well attended, and gave the most unbounded satisfaction. MR. BROWN'S Drama is, in itself, a masterly refutation of all apologies for slavery, and abounds in wit, satire, philosophy, argument and facts, all ingeniously interwoven into one of the most interesting dramatic compositions of modern times.—*Auburn (N.Y.) Daily Advertiser.*

MR. BROWN exhibits a dramatic talent possessed by few who have, under the best instructions, made themselves famous on the stage. He evinces a talent for tragic and comic representation rarely combined. If you want a good laugh, go and hear him. If you want instruction or information upon the most interesting question of the day, go and hear him. You cannot fail to be pleased. So highly pleased were those who heard it in Auburn, that twenty-eight of the leading men of the city, over their own signatures, extended an invitation to him, through the *Daily*

Advertiser, to return and repeat the Drama. Among them we recognize the names of Hon. B. F. Hall, of the State Senate, and the Rev. Wm. Hosmer, editor of the *Northern Independent*.[24] Such a compliment entitles MR. BROWN to crowded houses wherever he goes.—*Seneca Falls Courier.*

24. Both Hall and Hosmer (1810–89) were residents of Auburn, New York, the hometown of William Seward and a center for antislavery reform. Hall operated primarily through the state senate, Hosmer through the Methodist Church and his editorship of the local *Northern Independent*.

CHAPTER SIX

Writing African American History

Early in the Civil War Brown decided to take up a new literary challenge: the writing of history. The immediate driving force was the knowledge that he and his contemporaries were living in momentous times. The greater the duration and scale of the war, the more likely it was that its outcome would transform the status of the slaves and perhaps that of black people throughout the country. The timing was therefore ripe for Brown's new undertaking, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, the first of three histories of people of African American and pan-African descent that he published within a decade.

One might fairly argue, in fact, that the time for the writing of African American history had never been riper. The tectonic shifting of North American race relations brought on by the Civil War necessitated full-scale discussion about the past, present, and future of peoples of African origin. The subject of the future of "the black man" was addressed frequently throughout the war years by black and white leaders alike. Brown himself frequently spoke on the subject during these years, and he included in his sketch of Frederick Douglass in *The Black Man* a long excerpt from Douglass's recent talk, "What Shall Be Done with the Slaves If Emancipated?"

Brown's turn to history had a personal dimension as well. He had long pondered the broader as well as more localized dimensions of African and American history. His interest in the field of history must have begun early; it certainly preceded rather than resulted from his full-time work in the antislavery movement. As early as 1840 he had visited the Caribbean, prob-

ably stopping at Cuba as well as at Haiti. Shortly before his permanent return to the United States from Europe in 1854, he delivered a long address in London on the subject of the Haitian Revolution that he brought out as a short book soon after resettling in Boston. All this time he was reading avidly in the fast-developing field of historical writing. He read, however, critically and reservedly. He particularly resented the well-entrenched interpretations of U.S. history that to his mind either segregated or simply erased the accomplishments of African American patriots. He made this point perhaps most forcefully in an 1854 essay in which he lamented that English public art presented a less censored depiction of people of African origin than did American art. Thinking and judging comparatively, Brown no sooner noted with pride the inclusion of a black comrade on the bas relief at the base of Lord Nelson's column at Trafalgar Square than he deplored what he had seen some years earlier when he visited the Revolutionary War monument commemorating the colonial defense of Fort Griswold, Connecticut: "I felt a degree of pride as I beheld the names of two Africans who had fallen in the fight, yet I was grieved but not surprised to find their names colonized off, and a line drawn between them and the whites. This was in keeping with American historical injustice to its colored heroes."[1]

In self-consciously setting himself the task of writing African American history during the war, Brown undertook to present a persuasive case in *The Black Man* for the qualities of a long-despised people soon to occupy a new status and play a new role in U.S. society. The book's underlying purpose, as he stated explicitly in its preface, was to "aid in vindicating the Negro's character, and show that he is endowed with those intellectual and amiable qualities which adorn and dignify human nature." To do so, in his thinking, was to right not just "American historical injustice" but also American

1. "Visit of a Fugitive Slave to the Grave of Wilberforce," in Julia Griffiths, ed., *Autographs for Freedom* (Auburn, N.Y.: Alden, Beardsley, 1854), 71. Nelson's Column, rising 185 feet and surmounted by a seventeen-foot statue of Lord Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), was already one of the landmarks of central London. Overlooking Trafalgar Square, it was built in commemoration of Nelson's great naval victory in 1805 over the French fleet, during which he was killed.

historiographical injustice. For Brown the many earlier histories written not only by white but also by other black authors required some combination of correction, revision, and expansion.

Brown was no academic historian and made little pretense of being one. The mode of historical writing that he practiced, which presented history through a series of individual sketches, catered to his strength as a narrative and imaginative writer rather than a systematically learned one. However, his methodological approach was not an entirely variant posture, as historians of the period typically emphasized the importance of narrative. When Brown defined biography as "individual history," as he did in introducing his sketch of Nat Turner, he was following the custom of the romantic age, which valorized the significance of the individual's life story. Carlyle focused on "heroes," Emerson on "representative men," and African American writers on singular black leaders. Common to this generation of history writers was a heightened belief in the ability of individuals to produce great changes in the collective life of their times, a belief that sanctioned the popular nineteenth-century genres of history and biography—not to mention, of biography as history.

Telling the story of his people immediately involved Brown, like his black predecessors, in the difficult position of working his way through a tangled ideological field of discourse. He was aware of both white and black history writers who had scripted American history without the presence of blacks as actors or even as inhabitants. Although Brown learned, and in some cases borrowed, from the most useful of these histories, he seems to have found no ready model for the kind of book he wished to write. In addition, he also faced the elementary problem of gathering reliable information. He therefore concentrated on the rudiments, relying on his ability to gather and present factual information as well as to scavenge it from existing sources. Perhaps this is why he boasted in his preface that his was a pioneering venture made possible by hard personal labor: "The characters represented in most of these biographies are for the first time put in print. The author's long sojourn in Europe, his opportunity of research amid the archives of England and France, and his visit to the West Indies, have given him the advantage of information respecting the blacks seldom acquired." In actuality,

his knowledge of many of these figures was superficial and factual mistakes were numerous.

Brown composed *The Black Man* in 1861–62, when the outcome of the Civil War was uncertain. As usual he wrote during interludes; he remained active on the lecture circuit as a vigorous proponent of abolition and racial equality. He introduced the volume with "A Memoir of the Author," the latest incarnation of his ever-shifting autobiography, followed by a polemical essay on racist thought. Intending to broaden the list of prominent historical figures, Brown filled the book with biographical sketches of fifty-three leading African Americans and African Caribbeans. True to his egalitarian political principles he made clear that his title was strictly generic by including sketches of three women: Phillis Wheatley, Frances Ellen Watkins, and Charlotte Forten. Many of his choices were predictable: Benjamin Banneker, Crispus Attucks, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Robison Delany, James Pennington, William C. Nell, and Bishop Payne. Other choices were curious, such as his decision to reprint, nearly verbatim, the sketch of Joseph Jenkins from *The American Fugitive*—this, in a work that included a sketch of the legitimate actor Ira Aldridge. More curious yet was the sketch titled "A Man without a Name," a fictionalized rendition of his own escape from slavery. One other interesting decision was to include a sprinkling of poems by Wheatley, Watkins, and James Whitfield in their sketches, as Brown continued his practice of liberally mixing genres.

Brown arranged for joint publication of *The Black Man* in Boston with Robert F. Wallcut and in New York with Thomas Hamilton. Both men had already served him as publisher in recent years—Wallcut of *The Escape* and Hamilton, a dynamic African American newspaper and magazine publisher, of a revised version of *Clotel* that was renamed *Miralda; or, The Beautiful Quadroon* and ran as a serial during winter 1860–61 in Hamilton's well-regarded *Weekly Anglo-African*.[2]

2. Brown also submitted occasional nonfiction pieces to the *Weekly Anglo-African* during the early 1860s, including polemical exchanges with African American colleagues. In summer 1863 he returned to the journal to defend *The Black Man* at length against its critics.

As was his custom, Brown saw *The Black Man* through its printing close to home in Boston. The work was stereotyped at the Boston Stereotype Foundry, the high-quality printing plant where Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was produced in 1852 and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1860. *The Black Man* proved a popular work, passing through several printings as well as appearing in a slightly expanded second edition during 1864–65.

The subheadings for the individual sketches are mine.

SELECTIONS FROM

The Black Man

The Black Man and His Antecedents

Brown's introductory essay for the book was evidently written in a snappish mood. The immediate irritant seems to have been President Lincoln's brutally frank statement in summer 1862, made just weeks before he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, that there existed a fundamental, immutable inequality between the races. But that irritant only exacerbated an existing condition: blacks' long-standing grievance about racial inequality in U.S. society. As a man of ideas as well as of action, Brown repeatedly encountered in the recent literature of behavioral and biological "science" a systematic attempt to give racism an objective basis. Brown and his peers regarded this effort more as a pathological syndrome than a cogent ethnography, and they labeled it dismissively as "negrophobia" or "colorphobia."[1]

Brown had clearly done extensive reading on the primary and secondary literatures of race and racism, returning to sources about peoples in the ancient world and tracing a racial trail from them to the present. In entering the ongoing polemical debate about the putatively mutually exclusive virtues of the warring races, he adopted the rhetorical strategy that the best defense is a good offense. Common to the multiple arguments he makes in this essay is the attempt to reverse the normal hierarchical valuation of white over black. Brown was original neither in the arguments that he was making nor in the role he was playing; more properly understood, he was part of a phalanx of contemporary black polemicists that included James Pennington, Martin Delany, and James M'Cune Smith. This phalanx of reformers, whose numbers grew as the movement intensified in the years leading up to the war, set out to strategically debunk conventional beliefs about the races and used the genre of history to do so.[2] But Brown's distinctive, sarcastic voice can be heard in the spiteful pleasure he takes in blunting the charge of African barbarism and routing the accusation back to its sender.

The text of these selections comes from the first edition: *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (New York: Thomas Hamilton; Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1863).

1. Brown, for example, used the terms in the last two paragraphs of *The American Fugitive* (see chapter 3).

2. Pennington, Delany, and Smith are subjects of sketches in *The Black Man.*

Of the great family of man, the negro has, during the last half century, been more prominently before the world than any other race. He did not seek this notoriety. Isolated away in his own land, he would have remained there, had it not been for the avarice of other races, who sought him out as a victim of slavery. Two and a half centuries of the negro's enslavement have created, in many minds, the opinion that he is intellectually inferior to the rest of mankind; and now that the blacks seem in a fair way to get their freedom in this country, it has been asserted, and from high authority in the government, that the natural inferiority of the negro makes it impossible for him to live on this continent with the white man, unless in a state of bondage.

In his interview with a committee of the colored citizens of the District of Columbia, on the 14th of August last, the President of the United States intimated that the whites and the blacks could not live together in peace, on account of one race being superior intellectually to the other.[3] Mr. Postmaster General Blair, in his letter to the Union mass meeting held at the Cooper Institute, in New York, in March last, takes this ground.[4] The Boston "Post" and "Courier" both take the same position.[5]

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3. Lincoln met formally with five black ministers at the White House on August 14, 1862, for the purpose of making known his views on the fundamental disparity between the races. In prepared remarks he argued for the necessity of physical separation of the races and called for resettlement of African Americans in foreign locations such as Central America. Those views soon circulated in the press, infuriating black leaders.

4. Montgomery Blair (1813–83) served as postmaster general in the Lincoln administration from 1861 to 1864. Although an opponent of slavery, he was no believer in the equality of the races. He grew increasingly disenchanted with Reconstruction policies and gradually drifted out of the Republican and into the Democratic Party.

Cooper Institute, erected in 1859, was one of the principal meeting halls in New York City. During the Civil War it was the site of mass gatherings by both proponents and opponents of the conflict. It hosted the great speech (often called the Cooper Union Address) of February 27, 1860, that brought Abraham Lincoln national recognition and strengthened his bid for the presidential nomination of the Republican Party. Several months later Brown spoke there before the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

5. Union newspapers such as the *Boston Post* and *Boston Courier* took strong and varied positions on the full gamut of race-based issues. Brown was a close follower of the national press and kept apprised of the editorial policies of many newspapers, but naturally he knew best those of his hometown of Boston.

I admit that the condition of my race, whether considered in a mental, moral, or intellectual point of view, at the present time cannot compare favorably with the Anglo-Saxon.[6] But it does not become the whites to point the finger of scorn at the blacks, when they have so long been degrading them. The negro has not always been considered the inferior race. The time was when he stood at the head of science and literature. Let us see.[7]

It is the generally received opinion of the most eminent historians and ethnologists, that the Ethiopians were really negroes, although in them the physical characteristics of the race were exhibited in a less marked manner than in those dwelling on the coast of Guinea, from whence the stock of American slaves has been chiefly derived.[8] That, in the earliest periods of history, the Ethiopians had attained a high degree of civilization, there is every reason to believe; and that to the learning and science derived from them we must ascribe those wonderful monuments which still exist to attest the power and skill of the ancient Egyptians.

Among those who favor this opinion is our own distinguished countryman, Alexander H. Everett, and upon this evidence I base my argument.[9] Volney assumes it as a settled point that the Egyptians were black.[10] Herodotus, who travelled extensively through that interesting

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6. The racial-ethnic term *Anglo-Saxon* was in common use to designate people generally of white, western European, Protestant origin. Meant to be scientific, objective, and normative, the term was often inexact, subjective, and arbitrarily applied in a society more heterogeneous than users of the term wished to see.

7. Brown is about to enter the controversy about the origins of various African peoples and their contributions to modern civilization.

8. The main source of African slaves brought to the United States was the territory along the coast of West Africa, from Senegal to Angola.

9. Alexander Hill Everett (1792–1847) was a learned writer, editor (of the respected *North American Review*), and professional diplomat.

10. Brown presumably had read *The Ruins, or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires*, by Count Constantin-François de Volney (1757–1820). Volney was a French philosopher, scholar, and politician who visited Egypt in 1783–85 and reported his observation that the ancient Egyptians must have been black, not white, as he and others had previously believed. That revisionary view helped Brown and his contemporaries to challenge established notions about the supposedly barbaric origins of African civilization.

land, set them down as black, with curled hair, and having the negro features.[11] The sacred writers were aware of their complexion: hence the question, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?"[12] The image of the negro is engraved upon the monuments of Egypt, not as a bondman, but as the master of art. The Sphinx, one of the wonders of the world, surviving the wreck of centuries, exhibits these same features at the present day.[13] Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, was supposed to have been an African princess. Atlas, whose shoulders sustained the globe, and even the great Jupiter Ammon himself, were located by the mythologists in Africa. Though there may not be much in these fables, they teach us, nevertheless, who were then considered the nobles of the human race. Euclid, Homer, and Plato were Ethiopians. Terence, the most refined and accomplished scholar of his time, was of the same race.[14] Hanno, the father of Hamilear, and grandfather of Hannibal, was a negro.[15] These are the antecedents of the enslaved blacks on this continent.

From whence sprang the Anglo-Saxon? For, mark you, it is he that

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11. Often referred to as "the Father of History," the Greek writer Herodotus (active in the fifth century BCE) is one of our main sources on events in the ancient world. Brown uses Herodotus's remarks in the *Histories* about the features of ancient Egyptians to confirm Volney's conclusion.

12. Jeremiah 13:23.

13. The Great Sphinx, constructed forty-five hundred years ago in Giza (just south of Cairo), is a monumental statue with a lion's body and human's head. Brown was following a long-standing practice in trying to decipher racial characteristics from its face.

14. Euclid (323 BCE–283 BCE) was a Greek mathematician resident in Alexandria, Egypt, who did foundational work in geometry and other fields of mathematics. Homer, about whose life little is known and whose actual existence as the foundational poet of ancient Greece is today disputed, was traditionally identified as the author of the epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Plato (ca. 424 BCE–ca. 348 BCE), active in Athens during its golden age, was one of the foundational philosophers of classical and western civilization. Brown presumably accepted the view that Plato traveled to Egypt and absorbed Egyptian thought. More broadly, Brown accepted a view of all three as racially and culturally African that would today be controversial.

15. Hannibal (247–183 BCE) was a daring, innovative North African military leader who led the Carthaginian army to near victory against the Romans in the Punic Wars. Brown's contemporaries debated whether Hannibal was of Semitic or black African origin.

denies the equality of the negro. "When the Britons first became known to the Tyrian mariners," says Macaulay, "they were little superior to the Sandwich Islanders."[16]

Hume says they were a rude and barbarous people, divided into numerous tribes, dressed in the skins of wild beasts.[17] Druidism was their religion, and they were very superstitious.[18] Such is the first account we have of the Britons. When the Romans invaded that country, they reduced the people to a state of vassalage as degrading as that of slavery in the Southern States. Their king, Caractacus, was captured and sent a slave to Rome. Still later, Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon generals, presented another yoke, which the Britons were compelled to wear. But the last dregs of the bitter cup of humiliation were drunk when William of Normandy met Harold at Hastings, and, with a single blow, completely annihilated the nationality of the Britons.[19] Thousands of the conquered people were then sent to the slave markets of Rome, where they were sold very cheap on account of their inaptitude to learn.

This is not very flattering to the President's ancestors, but it is just. Caesar, in writing home, said of the Britons, "They are the most ignorant

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16. Tyre, a seaport located on the Mediterranean coast of what today is Lebanon, was the hub of the ancient Phoenician maritime empire. The Sandwich Islands, so named by their eighteenth-century discoverer, Captain James Cook, are universally known today as the Hawaiian Islands.

The (slightly misstated) quotation comes from chapter 1, volume 1, of *The History of England* by Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800–59), prolific man of letters, politician, and one of Victorian England's best-regarded historians. His immensely successful, five-volume *History of England* (1849–61) was reprinted across the English-speaking world.

17. David Hume (1711–76), Scottish-born philosopher, writer, and historian, was one of the most important thinkers of the Enlightenment. Brown was referring loosely to passages in the first volume of Hume's magisterial *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688.*

18. Druidism was an ancient pagan religion predating contact with the Roman Empire that was practiced principally by the Celts and Gauls. Versions of it are still practiced today.

19. At the historic battle at Hastings in 1066 CE, the French/Norman army led by William the Conqueror (ca. 1027–87) defeated the Anglo-Saxon army led by Harold (ca. 1022–66). The Norman Conquest changed the course of English history and culture.

people I ever conquered. They cannot be taught music."[20] Cicero, writing to his friend Atticus, advised him not to buy slaves from England, "because," said he, "they cannot be taught to read, and are the ugliest and most stupid race I ever saw."[21] I am sorry that Mr. Lincoln came from such a low origin; but he is not to blame. I only find fault with him for making mouths at me.

"You should not the ignorant negro despise;
Just such your sires appeared in Caesar's eyes."

The Britons lost their nationality, became amalgamated with the Romans, Saxons, and Normans, and out of this conglomeration sprang the proud Anglo-Saxon of to-day. I once stood upon the walls of an English city, built by enslaved Britons when Julius Caesar was their master. The image of the ancestors of President Lincoln and Montgomery Blair, as represented in Britain, was carved upon the monuments of Rome, where they may still be seen in their chains. Ancestry is something which the white American should not speak of, unless with his lips to the dust.

"Nothing," says Macaulay, "in the early existence of Britain, indicated the greatness which she was destined to attain." Britain has risen, while proud Rome, once the mistress of the world, has fallen; but the image of the early Englishman in his chains, as carved twenty centuries ago, is still to be seen upon her broken monuments. So has Egypt fallen; and her sable sons and daughters have been scattered into nearly every land where the white man has introduced slavery and disgraced the soil with his footprint. As I gazed upon the beautiful and classic obelisk of Luxor, removed from Thebes, where it had stood four thousand years, and transplanted to the Place de la Concorde, at Paris, and contemplated its hieroglyphic inscription of the noble daring of Sesostris, the African general,

20. Julius Caesar (ca. 100 BCE–44 BCE) and his Roman legions expeditiously defeated the local forces of the Britons in 54 BCE but departed without following up on their advantage. His contempt for the Britons is clear in the account he gives of his campaign in *The Gallic War*.

21. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) was an influential Roman politician and author. He interested Brown chiefly, however, for the low view of Britons that Brown represents him as holding in common with his contemporary Julius Caesar.

who drew kings at his chariot wheels, and left monumental inscriptions from Ethiopia to India, I felt proud of my antecedents, proud of the glorious past, which no amount of hate and prejudice could wipe from history's page, while I had to mourn over the fall and the degradation of my race.[22] But I do not despair; for the negro has that intellectual genius which God has planted in the mind of man, that distinguishes him from the rest of creation, and which needs only cultivation to make it bring forth fruit. No nation has ever been found, which, by its own unaided efforts, by some powerful inward impulse, has arisen from barbarism and degradation to civilization and respectability. There is nothing in race or blood, in color or features, that imparts susceptibility of improvement to one race over another. The mind left to itself from infancy, without culture, remains a blank. Knowledge is not innate. Development makes the man. As the Greeks, and Romans, and Jews drew knowledge from the Egyptians three thousand years ago, and the Europeans received it from the Romans, so must the blacks of this land rise in the same way. As one man learns from another, so nation learns from nation. Civilization is handed from one people to another, its great fountain and source being God our Father. No one, in the days of Cicero and Tacitus, could have predicted that the barbarism and savage wildness of the Germans would give place to the learning, refinement, and culture which that people now exhibit.[23] Already the blacks on this continent, though kept down under the heel of the white man, are fast rising in the scale of intellectual development, and proving their equality with the brotherhood of man.

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22. The splendid temple of Luxor, located on the eastern bank of the Nile, was one of the two great structures (along with the Temple of Karnak) in the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes. Only one of the temple's two granite obelisks remains; the other was removed to Paris and installed in 1836 in its present location at the center of the Place de la Concorde.

Sesostris (d. 1926 BCE) ruled Egypt for nearly a half century and expanded its power through military expeditions against the Nubians, Libyans, and other neighboring peoples.

23. Cornelius Tacitus (ca. 56 CE–ca. 117 CE), Roman orator, politician, and historian, has served since antiquity as a major source on the early years of the empire.

In the nineteenth century Germany was emerging as a leader in science, culture, and education.

In his address before the Colonization Society, at Washington, on the 18th of January, 1853, Hon. Edward Everett said, "When I lived in Cambridge, a few years ago, I used to attend, as one of the board of visitors, the examinations of a classical school, in which was a colored boy, the son of a slave in Mississippi, I think.[24] He appeared to me to be of pure African blood. There were at the same time two youths from Georgia, and one of my own sons, attending the same school. I must say that this poor negro boy, Beverly Williams, was one of the best scholars at the school, and in the Latin language he was the best scholar in his class. There are others, I am told, which show still more conclusively the aptitude of the colored race for *every kind of intellectual culture*."

Mr. Everett cited several other instances which had fallen under his notice, and utterly scouted the idea that there was any general inferiority of the African race. He said, "They have done as well as persons of European or Anglo-American origin would have done, after three thousand years of similar depression and hardship. The question has been asked, 'Does not the negro labor under some incurable, natural inferiority?' *In this, for myself, I have no belief.*"

I think that this is ample refutation of the charge of the natural inferiority of the negro. President Lincoln, in the interview to which I have already referred, said, "But for your race among us there would not be a war." This reminds me of an incident that occurred while travelling in the State of Ohio, in 1844. Taking the stage coach at a small village, one of the passengers (a white man) objected to my being allowed a seat inside, on account of my color. I persisted, however, in claiming the right which my ticket gave me, and got in. The objector at once took a seat on a trunk on the top of the coach. The wire netting round the top of the stage not being strong, the white passenger, trunks and all, slid off as we were going down a steep hill. The top passenger's shoulder was dislo-

24. Edward Everett (1794–1865) served in many public roles: governor of Massachusetts, ambassador to Great Britain, president of Harvard University, U.S. representative and senator, and—at the time of the address that Brown is quoting—secretary of state under President Millard Fillmore.

cated, and in his pain he cried out, "If you had not been black, I should not have left my seat inside."

The "New York Herald," the "Boston Post," the "Boston Courier," and the "New York Journal of Commerce," take the lead in misrepresenting the effect which emancipation in the West Indies had upon the welfare of those islands.[25] It is asserted that general ruin followed the black man's liberation. As to the British colonies, the fact is well established that slavery had impoverished the soil, demoralized the people, bond and free, brought the planters to a state of bankruptcy, and all the islands to ruin, long before Parliament had passed the act of emancipation. All the colonies, including Jamaica, had petitioned the home government for assistance, ten years prior to the liberation of their slaves. It is a noticeable fact, that the free blacks were the least embarrassed, in a pecuniary point of view, and that they appeared in more comfortable circumstances than the whites. There was a large proportion of free blacks in each of the colonies, Jamaica alone having fifty-five thousand before the day of emancipation. A large majority of the West India estates were owned by persons residing in Europe, and who had never seen the colonies. These plantations were carried on by agents, overseers, and clerks, whose mismanagement, together with the blighting influence which chattel slavery takes with it wherever it goes, brought the islands under impending ruin, and many of the estates were mortgaged in Europe for more than their value. One man alone, Neil Malcomb, of London, had forty plantations to fall upon his hands for money advanced on them before the abolition of slavery. These European proprietors, despairing of getting any returns from the West Indies, gladly pocketed their share of the twenty million pounds sterling, which the home government gave them, and abandoned their estates to their ruin. Other proprietors residing in the colonies formed combinations to make the emancipated people labor for scarcely enough to purchase food for them. If found idle, the tread-

25. Brown singles out these four daily newspapers specifically for their hostility to the 1833 emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies, but he knew that they also frequently took reactionary positions on a broader range of racial issues.

wheel, the chain-gang, the dungeon, with black bread, and water from the moat, and other modes of legalized torture, were inflicted upon the negroes. Through the determined and combined efforts of the land owners, the condition of the freed people was as bad, if not worse, for the first three years after their liberation, than it was before. Never was an experiment more severely tested than that of emancipation in the West Indies.

Nevertheless, the principles of freedom triumphed; not a drop of blood was shed by the enfranchised blacks; the colonies have arisen from the blight which they labored under in the time of slavery; the land has increased in value; and, above all, that which is more valuable than cotton, sugar, or rice — the moral and intellectual condition of both blacks and whites is in a better state now than ever before. Sir William Colebrook, governor of Antigua, said, six years after the islands were freed, "At the lowest computation, the land, without a single slave upon it, is fully as valuable now as it was, including all the slaves, before emancipation."[26] In a report made to the British Parliament, in 1859, it was stated that three fifths of the cultivated land of Jamaica was the *bona fide* property of the blacks. The land is in a better state of cultivation now than it was while slavery existed, and both imports and exports show a great increase. Every thing demonstrates that emancipation in the West India islands has resulted in the most satisfactory manner, and fulfilled the expectation of the friends of freedom throughout the world.

Rev. Mr. Underhill, secretary of the English Baptist Missionary Society, who has visited Jamaica, and carefully studied its condition, said, in a recent speech in London, that the late slaves in that island had built some two hundred and twenty chapels.[27] The churches that worship in them

26. William Colebrook (1787–1865) was a distinguished career civil servant whose posts included Ceylon, India, Java, and Sumatra before he was appointed governor of the Caribbean island of Antigua. The island's black majority population received emancipation following the 1833 edict of abolition in the British West Indies.

27. The Baptist Missionary Society was founded in Kettering, England, in 1792. By the mid-nineteenth century it was sending out missionaries to many parts of the world, including those independent of, but influenced by, the spread of English power.

number fifty-three thousand communicants, amounting to one eighth of the total population. The average attendance, in other than the state churches, is ninety-one thousand — a fourth of the population. One third of the children — twenty-two thousand — are in the schools. The blacks voluntarily contribute twenty-two thousand pounds (one hundred and ten thousand dollars) annually for religious purposes. Their landed property exceeds five million dollars. Valuing their cottages at only fifty dollars each, these amount to three million dollars. They have nearly three hundred thousand dollars deposited in the savings banks. The sum total of their property is much above eleven million dollars. All this has been accumulated since their emancipation.

Thus it is seen that all parties have been benefited by the abolition of negro slavery in the British possessions. Now we turn to our own land. Among the many obstacles which have been brought to bear against emancipation, one of the most formidable has been the series of objections urged against it upon what has been supposed to be the slave's want of appreciation of liberty, and his ability to provide for himself in a state of freedom; and now that slavery seems to be near its end, these objections are multiplying, and the cry is heard all over the land, "What shall be done with the slave if freed?"

It has been clearly demonstrated, I think, that the enslaved of the south are as capable of self-support as any other class of people in the country. It is well known that, throughout the entire south, a large class of slaves have been for years accustomed to hire their time from their owners.[28] Many of these have paid very high prices for the privilege. Some able mechanics have been known to pay as high as six hundred dollars per annum, besides providing themselves with food and clothing; and this class of slaves, by their industry, have taken care of themselves so well, and their appearance has been so respectable, that many of the states have passed laws prohibiting masters from letting their slaves out to

28. Arrangements were sometimes made for slaves with marketable skills, like the teenaged Brown, to hire their services to outside employers for specified times. Typically, most of their wages were pocketed by their masters.

themselves, because, as it was said, it made the other slaves dissatisfied to see so many of their fellows well provided, and accumulating something for themselves in the way of pocket money.

The Rev. Dr. Nehemiah Adams, whose antecedents have not been such as to lead to the suspicion that he favors the free colored men, or the idea of giving to the slaves their liberty, in his "South-Side View," unconsciously and unintentionally gives a very valuable statement upon this particular point.[29] Dr. Adams says, "A slave woman having had three hundred dollars stolen from her by a white man, her master was questioned in court as to the probability of her having had so much money. The master said that he not unfrequently had borrowed fifty and a hundred dollars from her himself, and added that she was always very strict as to his promised time of payment." There was a slave woman who had not only kept every agreement with her master — paying him every cent she had promised — but had accumulated three hundred dollars towards purchasing her liberty; and it was stolen from her, not by a black man, but, as Dr. Adams says, by a white man.

But one of the clearest demonstrations of the ability of the slave to provide for himself in a state of freedom is to be found in the prosperous condition of the large free colored population of the Southern States. Maryland has eighty thousand, Virginia seventy thousand, and the other slave states have a large number. These free people have all been slaves, or they are the descendants of those who were once slaves; what they have gained has been acquired in spite of the public opinion and laws of the south, in spite of prejudice, and every thing. They have acquired a large amount of property; and it is this industry, this sobriety, this intelligence,

29. Nehemiah Adams (1806–1878) was a Congregationalist minister from Boston who made himself obnoxious to reformers by his conservative views on blacks and women. Brown was one of numerous critics who singled out "South-Side Adams" for the defense he made of slavery and other Southern practices in *A South-Side View of Slavery* (1854). In fact, Brown berated Adams repeatedly in public, going so far as to write a now-lost play, *Experience*, that was said to have satirized Adams's views. *Experience* was an antislavery portrayal of a Northern white minister unjustly sold into slavery during a trip down South but eventually redeemed, restored to his normal state of freedom, and returned home a transformed man.

and this wealth of the free colored people of the south, that has created so much prejudice on the part of slaveholders against them. They have felt that the very presence of a colored man, looking so genteelly and in such a prosperous condition, made the slaves unhappy and discontented. In the Southern Rights Convention which assembled at Baltimore, June 8, 1860, a resolution was adopted, calling on the legislature to pass a law driving the free colored people out of the state.[30] Nearly every speaker took the ground that the free colored people must be driven out to make the slave's obedience more secure. Judge Mason, in his speech, said, "It is the thrifty and well-to-do free negroes, that are seen by our slaves, that make them dissatisfied." A similar appeal was made to the legislature of Tennessee. Judge Catron, of the Supreme Court of the United States, in a long and able letter to the Nashville "Union," opposed the driving out of the colored people.[31] He said they were among the best mechanics, the best artisans, and the most industrious laborers in the state, and that to drive them out would be an injury to the state itself. This is certainly good evidence in their behalf.

The New Orleans "True Delta" opposed the passage of a similar law by the State of Louisiana. Among other things it said, "There are a large free colored population here, correct in their general deportment, honorable in their intercourse with society, and free from reproach so far as the laws are concerned, not surpassed in the inoffensiveness of their lives by any equal number of persons in any place, north or south."

A movement was made in the legislature of South Carolina to expel the free blacks from that state, and a committee was appointed to investi-

30. After the Democratic Party's national convention in Charleston, South Carolina, failed to agree on a presidential nominee, a second one met in Baltimore. It too was riven by disagreements and broke into two factions, one that nominated Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and one (the breakaway group whose meeting was labeled the "Southern Rights Convention") that nominated John Breckinridge of Kentucky.

31. John Catron (1786–1865), a jurist from Nashville, Tennessee, served as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1837 to 1865. He sided with Chief Justice Roger Taney and the majority in the Dred Scott case and in general supported slavery; however, Catron firmly opposed secession.

gate the matter. In their report the committee said, "We find that the free blacks of this state are among our most industrious people; in this city (Charleston) we find that they own over two and a half millions of dollars worth of property; that they pay two thousand seven hundred dollars tax to the city."

Dr. Nehemiah Adams, whom I have already quoted, also testifies to the good character of the free colored people; but he does it unintentionally; it was not a part of the programme; how it slipped in I cannot tell. Here it is, however, from page 41 of his "South-Side View":—

"A prosecuting officer, who had six or eight counties in his district, told me that, during eight years service, he had made out about two thousand bills of indictment, of which not more than twelve were against colored persons."

Hatred of the free colored people, and abuse of them, have always been popular with the pro-slavery people of this country; yet, an American senator from one of the Western States—a man who never lost an opportunity to vilify and traduce the colored man, and who, in his last canvass for a seat in the United States Senate, argued that the slaves were better off in slavery than they would be if set free, and declared that the blacks were unable to take care of themselves while enjoying liberty—died, a short time since, twelve thousand dollars in debt to a black man, who was the descendant of a slave.

There is a Latin phrase—*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*.[32] It is not saying any thing against the reputation of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas to tell the fact that he had borrowed money from a negro. I only find fault with him that he should traduce the class that befriended him in the time of need. James Gordon Bennett, of the New York Herald, in a time of great pecuniary distress, soon after establishing his paper, borrowed three hundred dollars of a black man; and now he is one of our most relentless

32. Brown is using the Latin saying (which translates as "of the dead, speak no evil") in reference to the recently deceased Stephen A. Douglas (d. 1861), Lincoln's Democratic opponent in the 1860 presidential election. After the election Douglas supported Lincoln's overriding goal of preserving the Union and died in Illinois while on a speaking tour designed to strengthen Lincoln's position in the Midwest.

enemies.[33] Thus it is that those who fattened upon us often turn round and traduce us: Reputation is, indeed, dear to every nation and race; but to us, the colored people of this country, who have so many obstacles to surmount, it is doubly dear: —

> "Who steals my purse steals trash;
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
> But he who filches from me my good name,
> Robs me of that which not enriches him,
> And makes me poor indeed."[34]

You know we were told by the slaveholders, before the breaking out of the rebellion, that if we got into any difficulty with the south, their slaves would take up arms and fight to a man for them. Mr. Toombs, I believe, threatened that he would arm his slaves, and other men in Congress from the slave states made the same threat.[35] They were going to arm the slaves and turn them against the north. They said they could be trusted; and many people here at the north really believed that the slave did not want his liberty, would not have it if he could, and that the slave population was a very dangerous element against the north; but at once, on the approach of our soldiers, the slaves are seen, with their bundles and baskets, and hats and coats, and without bundles or baskets, and without hats or coats, rushing to our lines; demonstrating what we have so often said, that all the slave was waiting for was the opportunity to get his liberty. Why should you not have believed this? Why should you have supposed for a moment, that, because a man's color differs a

33. James Gordon Bennett (1795–1872) was the dynamic founding editor and publisher of the *New York Herald*, one of the most popular daily newspapers of the antebellum era. The *Herald* mirrored its brash, outspoken publisher with its provocative views, innovative methods, and disregard for respectability. Bennett reveled in using the paper to bait abolitionists and other opponents.

34. Brown relished these lines spoken by Iago in *Othello* (3.3.157–61).

35. Robert Toombs (1810–85), a wealthy plantation owner and long-serving U.S. representative and senator from Georgia, was one of the most ardent secessionists in Congress. He helped lead his state into secession.

little from yours, he is better contented to remain a slave than you would be, or that he has no inclination, no wish, to escape from the thraldom that holds him so tight? What is it that does not wish to be free?

"Go, let a cage with grates of gold,
And pearly roof, the eagle hold;
Let dainty viands be its fare,
And give the captive tenderest care;
But say, in luxury's limits pent,
Find you the king of birds content?
No; oft he'll sound the startling shriek,
And dash the cage with angry beak:
Precarious freedom's far more dear
Than all the prison's pampering cheer."[36]

As with the eagle, so with man. He loves to look upon the bright day and the stormy night; to gaze upon the broad, free ocean, its eternal surging tides, its mountain billows, and its foam-crested waves; to tread the steep mountain side; to sail upon the placid river; to wander along the gurgling stream; to trace the sunny slope, the beautiful landscape, the majestic forest, the flowery meadow; to listen to the howling of the winds and the music of the birds. These are the aspirations of man, without regard to country, clime, or color.

"What shall we do with the slave of the south? Expatriate him," say the haters of the negro. Expatriate him for what? He has cleared up the swamps of the south, and has put the soil under cultivation; he has built up her towns, and cities, and villages; he has enriched the north and Europe with his cotton, and sugar, and rice; and for this you would drive him out of the country! "What shall be done with the slaves if they are freed?" You had better ask "What shall we do with the slaveholders if the

36. The origin of this poem is now obscure, but the poem was well known in the antislavery movement. Frederick Douglass, for example, quoted it in several of his lectures in the late 1840s. A portion of it was printed as "Give Me Freedom: A Fragment" in Douglass's *North Star* (August 21, 1848).

slaves are freed?" The slave has shown himself better fitted to take care of himself than the slaveholder. He is the bone and sinew of the south; he is the producer, while the master is nothing but a consumer, and a very poor consumer at that. The slave is the producer, and he alone can be relied upon. He has the sinew, the determination, and the will; and if you will take the free colored people of the south as the criterion, take their past history as a sample of what the colored people are capable of doing, every one must be satisfied that the slaves can take care of themselves. Some say, "Let them alone; they are well cared for, and that is enough."

> "O, tell us not they're clothed and fed—
> 'Tis insult, stuff, and a' that;
> With freedom gone, all joy is fled,
> For Heaven's best gift is a' that."

But it is said, "The two races cannot live together in a state of freedom." Why, that is the cry that rung all over England thirty years ago: "If you liberate the slaves of the West Indies, they can't live with the whites in a state of freedom." Thirty years have shown the contrary. The blacks and the whites live together in Jamaica; they are all prosperous, and the island in a better condition than it ever was before the act of emancipation was passed.

But they tell us, "If the slaves are emancipated, we won't receive them upon an equality." Why, every man must make equality for himself. No society, no government, can make this equality. I do not expect the slave of the south to jump into equality; all I claim for him is, that he may be allowed to jump into liberty, and let him make equality for himself. I have some white neighbors around me in Cambridge; they are not very intellectual; they don't associate with my family; but whenever they shall improve themselves, and bring themselves up by their own intellectual and moral worth, I shall not object to their coming into my society—all things being equal.[37]

37. Brown moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1860.

Now, this talk about not letting a man come to this place or that, and that we won't do this for him, or won't do that for him, is all idle. The anti-slavery agitators have never demanded that you shall take the colored man, any more than that you shall take the uncultivated and uncouth white man, and place him in a certain position in society. All I demand for the black man is, that the white people shall take their heels off his neck, and let him have a chance to rise by his own efforts.

The idea of colonizing the slaves in some other country, outside of the United States, seems the height of folly. Whatever may be the mineral wealth of a country, or the producing capabilities of the soil, neither can be made available without the laborer. Four millions of strong hands cannot be spared from the Southern States. All time has shown that the negro is the best laborer in the tropics.

The slaves once emancipated and left on the lands, four millions of new consumers will spring into existence. Heretofore, the bondmen have consumed nothing scarcely from the north. The cost of keeping a slave was only about nineteen dollars per annum, including food, clothing, and doctors' bills. Negro cloth, negro shoes, and negro whips were all that were sent south by northern manufacturers. Let slavery be abolished, and stores will be opened and a new trade take place with the blacks south [*sic*]. Northern manufacturers will have to run on extra time till this new demand will have been supplied. The slave owner, having no longer an inducement to be idle, will go to work, and will not have time to concoct treason against the *stars and stripes*. I cannot close this appeal without a word about the free blacks in the non-slaveholding states.

The majority of the colored people in the Northern States descended from slaves: many of them were slaves themselves. In education, in morals, and in the development of mechanical genius, the free blacks of the Northern States will compare favorably with any laboring class in the world. And considering the fact that we have been shut out, by a cruel prejudice, from nearly all the mechanical branches, and all the professions, it is marvellous that we have attained the position we now occupy. Notwithstanding those bars, our young men have learned trades, become

artists, gone into the professions, although bitter prejudice may prevent their having a great deal of practice. When it is considered that they have mostly come out of bondage, and that their calling has been the lowest kind in every community, it is still more strange that the colored people have amassed so much wealth in every state in the Union. If this is not an exhibition of capacity, I don't understand the meaning of the term. And if true patriotism and devotion to the cause of freedom be tests of loyalty, and should establish one's claim to all the privileges that the government can confer, then surely the black man can demand his rights with a good grace. From the fall of Attucks, the first martyr of the American revolution in 1770, down to the present day, the colored people have shown themselves worthy of any confidence that the nation can place in its citizens in the time that tries men's souls.[38] At the battle of Bunker Hill, on the heights of Groton, at the ever-memorable battle of Red Bank, the sable sons of our country stood side by side with their white brethren. On Lakes Erie and Champlain, on the Hudson, and down in the valley of the Mississippi, they established their valor and their invincibility.[39] Whenever the rights of the nation have been assailed, the negro has always responded to his country's call, at once, and with every pulsation of his heart beating for freedom. And no class of Americans have manifested more solicitude for the success of the federal arms in the present struggle with rebellion, than the colored people. At the north, they were among the earliest to respond to the president's first proclamation, calling for troops. At the south, they have ever shown a preference for the *stars and stripes*. In his official despatch to Minister Adams, Mr. Secretary Seward said,—

38. Crispus Attucks (ca. 1723–1770), an escaped slave living in the Boston area, was the first of five colonists killed by a hail of British fire in what was soon provocatively named the Boston Massacre. Brown followed an already-established pattern among his fellow abolitionists, especially in Boston, of viewing Attucks as an American hero.

In referring to "the time that tries men's souls," Brown is paraphrasing the famous words of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), written during an earlier time of national crisis.

39. Brown is listing some of the major battles of the American Revolution.

"Every where the American general receives his most useful and reliable information from the negro, *who hails his coming as the harbinger of freedom.*"[40]

[Phillis Wheatley]

Brown's inclusion of Wheatley was not surprising. Wheatley was well known to Brown's generation of educated Americans, black and white. A five-page, illustrated sketch of Wheatley containing samples of her poems and correspondence with George Washington was included, for instance, in the Duyckinck brothers' comprehensive *Cyclopedia of American Literature* (1855)—although they failed to include a sketch of either Brown or Douglass. Brown's sketch of Wheatley, brief as it is, bears instructive comparison with that by Evert and George Duyckinck, white New York bibliophiles and men of leisure.

Both sketches are celebratory of a girl brought to America as a slave, purchased at the local slave market by a family of Boston merchants, and subsequently given a broad education that became the basis of her eventual growth into a noted public poet. The modes of apprehension of her life and writing, however, are strikingly different in the two sketches. The Duyckincks devoted concentrated attention to her life and work but interlaced it with polite analysis delivered from a condescending height, whereas Brown treated her more directly and respectfully as a peer, as well he should. The basic terms of her life anticipated his own: slavery and emancipation, literacy, publication, European travel, bourgeois respectability, and measured fame.

In the year 1761, when Boston had her slave market, and the descendants of the Pilgrims appeared to be the most pious and God-fearing people in the world, Mrs. John Wheatley went into the market one day,

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40. Charles Francis Adams (1807–86), the son of John Quincy Adams and grandson of John Adams, continued his family's tradition of distinguished public service. After serving in the Massachusetts legislature and Congress and running unsuccessfully in 1848 as the Free Soil Party candidate for vice president, Charles Francis Adams occupied the vital role of U.S. ambassador to England during the Civil War.

William Seward (1801–72) was serving as Lincoln's secretary of state. A leading figure in the formation of the Republican Party, Seward was more wholly committed to abolition than was Lincoln. Brown had had antislavery dealings with Seward in the 1840s.

for the purpose of selecting and purchasing a girl for her own use. Among the group of children just imported from the African coast was a delicately built, rather good-looking child of seven or eight years, apparently suffering from the recent sea voyage and change of climate. Mrs. Wheatley's heart was touched at the interesting countenance and humble modesty of this little stranger. The lady bought the child, and she was named Phillis. Struck with the slave's uncommon brightness, the mistress determined to teach her to read, which she did with no difficulty. The child soon mastered the English language, with which she was totally unacquainted when she landed upon the American shores. Her school lessons were all perfect, and she drank in the scriptural teachings as if by intuition. At the age of twelve, she could write letters and keep up a correspondence that would have done honor to one double her years. Mrs. Wheatley, seeing her superior genius, no longer regarded Phillis as a servant, but took her as a companion. It was not surprising that the slave girl should be an object of attraction, astonishment, and attention with the refined and highly cultivated society that weekly assembled in the drawing room of the Wheatleys. As Phillis grew up to womanhood, her progress and attainments kept pace with the promise of her earlier years. She drew around her the best educated of the white ladies, and attracted the attention and notice of the literary characters of Boston, who supplied her with books and encouraged the ripening of her intellectual powers. She studied the Latin tongue, and translated one of Ovid's tales, which was no sooner put in print in America, than it was republished in London, with eloquent commendations from the reviews. In 1773, a small volume of her poems, containing thirty-nine pieces, was published in London, and dedicated to the Countess of Huntingdon. The genuineness of this work was established in the first page of the volume, by a document signed by the governor of Massachusetts, the lieutenant-governor, her master, and fifteen of the most respectable and influential citizens of Boston, who were acquainted with her talents and the circumstances of her life. Her constitution being naturally fragile, she was advised by her physician to take a sea voyage as the means of restoring her declining health.

Phillis was emancipated by her master at the age of twenty-one years, and sailed for England. On her arrival, she was received and admired in the first circles of London society; and it was at that time that her poems were collected and published in a volume, with a portrait and memoir of the authoress. Phillis returned to America, and married Dr. Peters, a man of her own color, and of considerable talents. Her health began rapidly to decline, and she died at the age of twenty-six years, in 1780.[41] Fortunately rescued from the fate that awaits the victims of the slave trade, this injured daughter of Africa had an opportunity of developing the genius that God had given her, and of showing to the world the great wrong done to her race. The limited place allowed for this sketch will not permit of our giving more than one short poem from the pen of the gifted Phillis Wheatley.

"On the Death of a Young Girl"[42]

From dark abodes to fair ethereal light,
The enraptured innocent has winged her flight;
On the kind bosom of eternal love
She finds unknown beatitudes above.
This know, ye parents, nor her loss deplore—
She feels the iron hand of pain no more;
The dispensations of unerring grace
Should turn your sorrows into grateful praise;
Let, then, no tears for her henceforward flow
Nor stiffer grief in this dark vale below.

Her morning sun, which rose divinely bright,
Was quickly mantled with the gloom of night;

41. Brown's error: Wheatley was actually about thirty-one when she died in 1784.

42. The poem was published in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773), the first book published by an African American writer. Brown's text deviated from the original in a variety of ways. He retitled the poem from its original "On the Death of a Young Lady of Five Years of Age," replaced the proper name Nancy with "your child" in line 13, along with other verbal alterations, and slightly regularized spelling and punctuation.

But hear, in heaven's best bowers, your child so fair,
And learn to imitate her language there.
Thou, Lord, whom I behold with glory crowned,
By what sweet name, and in what tuneful sound,
Wilt thou be praised? Seraphic powers are faint
Infinite love and majesty to paint.
To thee let all their grateful voices raise,
And saints and angels join their songs of praise

Perfect in bliss, now from her heavenly home
She looks, and, smiling, beckons you to come;
Why then, fond parents, why these fruitless groans?
Restrain your tears, and cease your plaintive moans.
Freed from a world of sin, and snares, and pain,
Why would ye wish your fair one back again?
Nay, bow resigned; let hope your grief control,
And check the rising tumult of the soul.
Calm in the prosperous and the adverse day,
Adore the God who gives and takes away;

See him in all, his holy name revere,
Upright your actions, and your hearts sincere,
Till, having sailed through life's tempestuous sea,
And from its rocks and boisterous billows free,
Yourselves, safe landed on the blissful shore,
Shall join your happy child to part no more.

[Nat Turner]

Few names have elicited as visceral a reaction from Americans as that of Nat Turner, the leader of the failed 1831 slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia. Viewed alternately as satanic mass murderer or as martyred hero, Turner brought out the paranoid element in American history as few other personages have. Brown sided

with the small but significant minority, located mostly within the African American and abolitionist community, who saw Turner as a positive force in using violence to change the corrupted structure of American society. His sketch of Turner is the longest sketch in his book and positioned prominently after the opening sketch of Benjamin Banneker. Only late in life did Brown retreat from the admiration he had felt toward Turner during the years of the antislavery movement and Civil War.

According to the apologist logic of slavery, the phenomenon of Turner—either the act or its legacy—should never have occurred. Slaves who were said to find satisfaction in their circumstances should never have engaged in insurrection. Brown knew better and saw in Turner a kind of fraternal twin, a man who said no to the system and tried to persuade his fellow slaves to do likewise. In composing this sketch Brown sought to do Turner posthumous honor: Brown's stated purpose, as he says in his opening paragraph, was to bring attention to a man "whose history has hitherto been neglected" and "to do justice" to his memory. But to claim that Turner's memory was neglected was to exaggerate. Turner's name and deeds never ceased to circulate in American society after his execution, and they were alive as Brown wrote. To take only the most prominent example, John Brown was well aware of Turner's raid when he planned and executed his own on the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry with the similar intent of fomenting a slave insurrection. Or, to trace reverberations even closer to Brown's historical moment, President Lincoln expressed fears of slave insurrection throughout the Civil War and undoubtedly had Turner in mind as a precedent.

One naturally wonders about Brown's sources in gaining access to Turner's life story. In general, historians at the time had access to far fewer sources than do practicing historians today: libraries were few, and archives were more generally in the private domain than today. Furthermore, Turner was officially a proscribed subject in the South. What did exist—the document on which Brown chiefly based his sketch—was *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Baltimore, 1831), a pamphlet containing an account of Turner's life and raid supposedly in his own words, taken down by Thomas Gray, a local white lawyer, in the jail where Turner was held while awaiting trial and execution. Gray, in turn, transcribed Turner's "confession," took out a copyright for the text, and published it the day before Turner was hanged. Although Gray was openly an apologist for the society that enslaved, prosecuted, and executed Turner, Brown seemingly had fewer qualms about the accuracy of the text than do some readers and scholars today. He quoted from it at length and followed its narrative lead for the most part, if with several enhancements, as I discuss in the notes. For

interpretation of the *Confession*'s leading actor and its overall historical significance, however, Brown, as always, followed his own thinking.

Biography is individual history, as distinguished from that of communities, of nations, and of worlds. Eulogy is that deserved applause which springs from the virtues and attaches itself to the characters of men. This is not intended either as a biography or a eulogy, but simply a sketch of one whose history has hitherto been neglected, and to the memory of whom the American people are not prepared to do justice.

On one of the oldest and largest plantations in Southampton county, Virginia, owned by Benjamin Turner, Esq., Nat was born a slave, on the 2d of October, 1800.[43] His parents were of unmixed African descent. Surrounded as he was by the superstition of the slave quarters, and being taught by his mother that he was born for a prophet, a preacher, and a deliverer of his race, it was not strange that the child should have imbibed the principles which were afterwards developed in his career. Early impressed with the belief that he had seen visions, and received communications direct from God, he, like Napoleon, regarded himself as a being of destiny.[44] In his childhood Nat was of an amiable disposition; but circumstances in which he was placed as a slave, brought out incidents that created a change in his disposition, and turned his kind and docile feeling into the most intense hatred to the white race.

Being absent one night from his master's plantation without a pass, he was caught by Whitlock and Mull, the two district patrolers, and severely flogged.[45] This act of cruelty inflamed the young slave, and he resolved upon having revenge. Getting two of the boys of a neighboring plantation to join him, Nat obtained a long rope, went out at night on the road through which the officers had their beat, and stationing his companions,

43. The proper names in Brown's sketch are historically accurate.

44. Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821), military leader and emperor of France, led his country to a position of unparalleled power in Europe and spread Enlightenment ideas far beyond French borders.

45. This potentially formative incident in Turner's early life does not appear in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* or in any other known documentary source.

one on each side of the road, he stretched the rope across, fastening each end to a tree, and drawing it tight. His rope thus fixed, and his accomplices instructed how to act their part, Nat started off up the road. The night being dark, and the rope only six or eight inches from the ground, the slave felt sure that he would give his enemies a "high fall."

Nat hearing them, he called out in a disguised voice, "Is dat you, Jim?" To this Whitlock replied, "Yes, dis is me." Waiting until the white men were near him, Nat started off upon a run, followed by the officers. The boy had placed a sheet of white paper in the road, so that he might know at what point to jump the rope, so as not to be caught in his own trap. Arriving at the signal he sprung over the rope, and went down the road like an antelope. But not so with the white men, for both were caught by the legs and thrown so hard upon the ground that Mull had his shoulder put out of joint, and his face terribly lacerated by the fall; while Whitlock's left wrist was broken, and his head bruised in a shocking manner. Nat hastened home, while his companions did the same, not forgetting to take with them the clothes line which had been so serviceable in the conflict. The patrolers were left on the field of battle, crying, swearing, and calling for help.

Snow seldom falls as far south as the southern part of Virginia; but when it does, the boys usually have a good time snow-balling, and on such occasions the slaves, old and young, women and men, are generally pelted without mercy, and with no right to retaliate. It was only a few months after his affair with the patrolers, that Nat was attacked by a gang of boys, who chased him some distance, snow-balling with all their power. The slave boy knew the lads, and determined upon revenge. Waiting till night, he filled his pockets with rocks, and went into the street. Very soon the same gang of boys were at his heels, and pelting him. Concealing his face so as not to be known, Nat discharged his rocks in every direction, until his enemies had all taken to their heels.[46]

The ill treatment he experienced at the hands of the whites, and the visions he claimed to have seen, caused Nat to avoid, as far as he could,

46. This incident is also unknown outside Brown's sketch.

all intercourse with his follow-slaves, and threw around him a gloom and melancholy that disappeared only with his life.

Both the young slave and his friends averred that a full knowledge of the alphabet came to him in a single night. Impressed with the belief that his mission was a religious one, and this impression strengthened by the advice of his grandmother, a pious but ignorant woman, Nat commenced preaching when about twenty-five of age [*sic*], but never went beyond his own master's locality. In stature he was under the middle size, long armed, round-shouldered, and strongly marked with the African features. A gloomy fire burned in his looks, and he had a melancholy expression of countenance. He never tasted a drop of ardent spirits all his life, and was never known to smile. In the year 1828 new visions appeared to Nat, and he claimed to have direct communication with God. Unlike most of those born under the influence of slavery, he had no faith in conjuring, fortune-telling, or dreams, and always spoke with contempt of such things.[47] Being hired out to cruel masters, he ran away, and remained in the woods thirty days, and could have easily escaped to the free states, as did his father some years before; but he received, as he says in his confession a communication from the spirit, which said, "Return to your earthly master, for he who knoweth his Master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."[48] It was not the will of his earthly, but his heavenly Master that he felt bound to do, and therefore Nat returned. His follow-slaves were greatly incensed at him for coming back, for they knew well his ability to reach Canada, or some other land of freedom, if he was so inclined. He says further, "About this time I had a vision, and saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened, the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed

47. Conjuring was the act of summoning supernatural forces through sorcery to accomplish one's wishes. It was widely in practice among slaves.

48. The source of this quotation and others to follow is *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Baltimore, 1831), which Brown occasionally quotes with minor changes. The particular biblical verse quoted here (Luke 12:47) was commonly invoked as a justification for slavery (see chapter 1). But Brown (following Turner's interpretive practice) is careful to state that Turner reassigns it from human to divine authority.

in streams; and I heard a voice saying, 'Such is your luck; such are you called on to see; and let it come, rough or smooth, you must surely bear it.'" Some time after this, Nat had, as he says, another vision, in which the spirit appeared and said, "The serpent is loosened, and Christ has laid down the yoke he has borne for the sins of men, and you must take it up, and fight against the serpent, for the time is fast approaching when the first shall be last, and the last shall be first."[49] There is no doubt but that this last sentence filled Nat with enthusiastic feeling in favor of the liberty of his race, that he had so long dreamed of. "The last shall be first, and the first shall be last," seemed to him to mean something. He saw in it the overthrow of the whites, and the establishing of the blacks in their stead, and to this end he bent the energies of his mind. In February, 1831, Nat received his last communication, and beheld his last vision. He said, "I was told I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons."

The plan of an insurrection was now formed in his own mind, and the time had arrived for him to take others into the secret; and he at once communicated his ideas to four of his friends, in whom he had implicit confidence. Hark Travis, Nelson Williams, Sam Edwards, and Henry Porter were slaves like himself, and like him had taken their names from their masters. A meeting must be held with these, and it must take place in some secluded place, where the whites would not disturb them; and a meeting was appointed. The spot where they assembled was as wild and romantic as were the visions that had been impressed upon the mind of their leader.

Three miles from where Nat lived was a dark swamp filled with reptiles, in the middle of which was a dry spot, reached by a narrow, winding path, and upon which human feet seldom trod, on account of its having been the place where a slave had been tortured to death by a slow fire, for the crime of having flogged his cruel and inhuman master. The night for the meeting arrived, and they came together. Hank brought a pig; Sam, bread; Nelson, sweet potatoes; and Henry, brandy; and the

49. Mark 10:31.

gathering was turned into a feast. Others were taken in, and joined the conspiracy. All partook heartily of the food and drank freely, except Nat. He fasted and prayed. It was agreed that the revolt should commence that night, and in their own master's [*sic*] households, and that each slave should give his oppressor the death blow. Before they left the swamp Nat made a speech, in which he said, "Friends and brothers: We are to commence a great work tonight. Our race is to be delivered from slavery, and God has appointed us as the men to do his bidding, and let us be worthy of our calling. I am told to slay all the whites we encounter, without regard to age or sex. We have no arms or ammunition, but we will find these in the houses of our oppressors, and as we go on others can join us. Remember that we do not go forth for the sake of blood and carnage, but it is necessary that in the commencement of this revolution all the whites we meet should die, until we shall have an army strong enough to carry on the war upon a Christian basis. Remember that ours is not a war for robbery and to satisfy our passions; it is a struggle for freedom. Ours must be deeds, and not words. Then let's away to the scene of action."[50]

Among those who had joined the conspirators was Will, a slave, who scorned the idea of taking his master's name. Though his soul longed to be free, he evidently became one of the party, as much to satisfy revenge, as for the liberty that he saw in the dim distance. Will had seen a dear and beloved wife sold to the negro trader and taken away, never to be beheld by him again in this life. His own back was covered with scars, from his shoulders to his feet. A large scar, running from his right eye down to his chin, showed that he had lived with a cruel master. Nearly six feet in height, and one of the strongest and most athletic of his race, he proved to be the most unfeeling of all the insurrectionists. His only weapon was a broad-axe, sharp and heavy.

Nat and his accomplices at once started for the plantation of Joseph Travis, with whom the four lived, and there the first blow was struck. In his confession, just before his execution, Nat said,—

"On returning to the house, Hark went to the door with an axe, for

50. This speech is not in the original text and is apparently Brown's invention.

the purpose of breaking it open, as we knew we were strong enough to murder the family should they be awakened by the noise; but reflecting that it might create an alarm in the neighborhood, we determined to enter the house secretly, and murder them whilst sleeping. Hark got a ladder and set it against the chimney, on which I ascended, and hoisting a window, entered and came down stairs, unbarred the doors, and removed the guns from their places. It was then observed that I must spill the first blood. On which, armed with a hatchet, and accompanied by Will, I entered my master's chamber. It being dark, I could not give a death blow. The hatchet glanced from his head; he sprang from the bed and called his wife. It was his last word; Will laid him dead with a blow of his axe, and Mrs. Travis shared the same fate, as she lay in bed. The murder of this family, five in number, was the work of a moment; not one of them awoke. There was a little infant sleeping in a cradle, that was forgotten until we had left the house and gone some distance, when Henry and Will returned and killed it. We got here four guns that would shoot, and several old muskets, with a pound or two of powder. We remained for some time at the barn, where we paraded; I formed them in line as soldiers, and after carrying them through all the manoeuvres I was master of, marched them off to Mr. Salathiel Francis's, about six hundred yards distant.

"Sam and Will went to the door and knocked. Mr. Francis asked who was there; Sam replied it was he, and he had a letter for him; on this he got up and came to the door; they immediately seized him and dragging him out a little from the door, he was despatched by repeated blows on the head. There was no other white person in the family. We started from there to Mrs. Reese's, maintaining the most perfect silence on our march, where, finding the door unlocked, we entered and murdered Mrs. Reese in her bed while sleeping; her son awoke, but only to sleep the sleep of death; he had only time to say, 'Who is that?' and he was no more. From Mrs. Reese's we went to Mrs. Turner's, a mile distant, which we reached about sunrise, on Monday morning. Henry, Austin, and Sam, went to the still, where, finding Mr. Peebles, Austin shot him; the rest of us went to the house. As we approached, the family discovered us and shut the door.

Vain hope! Will, with one stroke of his axe, opened it, and we entered, and found Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Newsome in the middle of a room, almost frightened to death. Will immediately killed Mrs. Turner with one blow of his axe. I took Mrs. Newsome by the hand, and with the sword I had when apprehended, I struck her several blows over the head, but was not able to kill her, as the sword was dull. Will, turning round and discovering it, despatched her also. A general destruction of property, and search for money and ammunition, always succeeded the murders.

"By this time, my company amounted to fifteen, nine men mounted, who started for Mrs. Whitehead's, (the other six were to go through a by-way to Mr. Bryant's, and rejoin us at Mrs. Whitehead's.) As we approached the house we discovered Mr. Richard Whitehead standing in the cotton patch, near the lane fence; we called him over into the lane, and Will, the executioner, was near at hand, with his fatal axe, to send him to an untimely grave. As we pushed on to the house, I discovered some one running round the garden, and thinking it was some of the white family, I pursued, but finding it was a servant girl belonging to the house, I returned to commence the work of death; but they whom I left had not been idle: all the family were already murdered but Mrs. Whitehead and her daughter Margaret. As I came round to the door I saw Will pulling Mrs. Whitehead out of the house, and at the step he nearly severed her head from her body with his broadaxe. Miss Margaret, when I discovered her, had concealed herself in the corner formed by the projection of the cellar cap from the house; on my approach she fled, but was soon overtaken, and after repeated blows with a sword, I killed her by a blow over the head with a fence rail. By this time the six who had gone by Mr. Bryant's rejoined us, and informed me they had done the work of death assigned them. We again divided, part going to Mr. Richard Porter's, and from thence to Nathaniel Francis's, the others to Mr. Howell Harris's and Mr. T. Doyles's. On my reaching Mr. Porter's, he had escaped with his family. I understood there that the alarm had already spread, and I immediately returned to bring up those sent to Mr. Doyles's and Mr. Howell Harris's; the party I left going on to Mr. Francis's, having told them I would join them in that neighborhood. I met those sent to

Mr. Doyles's and Mr. Howell Harris's returning, having met Mr. Doyles on the road and killed him. Learning from some who joined them, that Mr. Harris was from home, I immediately pursued the course taken by the party gone on before; but knowing that they would complete the work of death and pillage at Mr. Francis's before I could get there, I went to Mr. Peter Edwards's, expecting to find them there; but they had been there already. I then went to Mr. John T. Barrow's; they had been there and murdered him. I pursued on their track to Captain Newitt Harris's. I found the greater part mounted and ready to start; the men, now amounting to about forty, shouted and hurrahed as I rode up; some were in the yard loading their guns, others drinking. They said Captain Harris and his family had escaped; the property in the house they destroyed, robbing him of money and other valuables. I ordered them to mount and march instantly; this was about nine or ten o'clock, Monday morning. I proceeded to Mr. Levi Waller's, two or three miles distant. I took my station in the rear, and as it was my object to carry terror and devastation wherever we went, I placed fifteen or twenty of the best mounted and most to be relied on in front, who generally approached the houses as fast as their horses could run; this was for two purposes, to prevent their escape and strike terror to the inhabitants — on this account I never got to the houses, after leaving Mrs. Whitehead's, until the murders were committed, except in one case. I sometimes got in sight in time to see the work of death completed, viewed the mangled bodies as they lay, in silent satisfaction, and immediately started in quest of other victims. Having murdered Mrs. Waller and ten children, we started for Mr. William Williams's. We killed him and two little boys that were there: while engaged in this, Mrs. Williams fled, and got some distance from the house, but she was pursued, overtaken, and compelled to get up behind one of the company, who brought her back, and after showing her the mangled body of her lifeless husband, she was told to get down and lie by his side, where she was shot dead. I then started for Mr. Jacob Williams's, where the family were murdered. Here we found a young man named Drury, who had come on business with Mr. Williams; he was pursued, overtaken, and shot. Mrs. Vaughan's was the next place we visited; and

after murdering the family here, I determined on starting for Jerusalem.[51] Our number amounted now to fifty or sixty, all mounted and armed with guns, axes, swords, and clubs. On reaching Mr. James W. Parker's gate, immediately on the road leading to Jerusalem, and about three miles distant, it was proposed to me to call there; but I objected, as I knew he was gone to Jerusalem, and my object was to reach there as soon as possible; but some of the men having relations at Mr. Parker's, it was agreed that they might call and get his people. I remained at the gate on the road, with seven or eight, the others going across the field to the house, about half a mile off. After waiting some time for them, I became impatient, and started to the house for them, and on our return we were met by a party of white men, who had pursued our blood-stained track, and who had fired on those at the gate, and dispersed them, which I knew nothing of, not having been at that time rejoined by any of them. Immediately on discovering the whites, I ordered my men to halt and form, as they appeared to be alarmed. The white men, eighteen in number, approached us in about one hundred yards, when one of them fired, and I discovered about half of them, retreating. I then ordered my men to fire and rush on them; the few remaining stood their ground until we approached within fifty yards, when they fired and retreated. We pursued and overtook some of them, whom we thought we left dead; after pursuing them about two hundred yards, and rising a little hill, I discovered they were met by another party, and had halted, and were reloading their guns, thinking that those who retreated first, and the party who fired on us at fifty or sixty yards distant, had only fallen back to meet others with ammunition. As I saw them reloading their guns, and more coming up than I saw at first, and several of my bravest men being wounded, the others became panic-struck and scattered over the field; the white men pursued and fired on us several times. Hark had his horse shot under him, and I caught another for him that was running by me; five or six of my men were wounded, but none left on the field. Finding myself defeated here, I

51. Jerusalem, Virginia, the Southampton County seat, was a strategic crossroads that Turner hoped to reach and control.

instantly determined to go through a private way, and cross the Nottoway River at the Cypress Bridge, three miles below Jerusalem, and attack that place in the rear, as I expected they would look for me on the other road, and I had a great desire to get there to procure arms and ammunition."

Reenforcements came to the whites, and the blacks were overpowered and defeated by the superior numbers of their enemy. In this battle many were slain on both sides. Will, the bloodthirsty and revengeful slave, fell with his broadaxe uplifted, after having laid three of the whites dead at his feet with his own strong arm and his terrible weapon. His last words were, "Bury my axe with me." For he religiously believed that in the next world the blacks would have a contest with the whites, and that he would need his axe. Nat Turner, after fighting to the last with his short sword, escaped with some others to the woods near by, and was not captured for nearly two months. When brought to trial he pleaded "not guilty"; feeling, as he said, that it was always right for one to strike for his own liberty. After going through a mere form of trial, he was convicted and executed at Jerusalem, the county seat for Southampton county, Virginia. Not a limb trembled or a muscle was observed to move. Thus died Nat Turner, at the early age of thirty-one years — a martyr to the freedom of his race, and a victim to his own fanaticism. He meditated upon the wrongs of his oppressed and injured people, till the idea of their deliverance excluded all other ideas from his mind, and he devoted his life to its realization. Every thing appeared to him a vision, and all favorable omens were signs from God. That he was sincere in all that he professed, there is not the slightest doubt. After being defeated he might have escaped to the free states, but the hope of raising a new band kept him from doing so.

He impressed his image upon the minds of those who once beheld him. His looks, his sermons, his acts, and his heroism live in the hearts of his race, on every cotton, sugar, and rice plantation at the south. The present generation of slaves have a superstitious veneration for his name, and believe that in another insurrection Nat Turner will appear and take command. He foretold that at his death the sun would refuse to shine,

and that there would be signs of disapprobation given from heaven. And it is true that the sun was darkened, a storm gathered, and more boisterous weather had never appeared in Southampton county than on the day of Nat's execution. The sheriff, warned by the prisoner, refused to cut the cord that held the trap. No black man would touch the rope. A poor old white man, long besotted by drink, was brought forty miles to be the executioner. And even the planters, with all their prejudice and hatred, believed him honest and sincere; for Mr. Gray, who had known Nat from boyhood, and to whom he made his confession, says of him,—[52]

"It has been said that he was ignorant and cowardly, and that his object was to murder and rob, for the purpose of obtaining money to make his escape. It is notorious that he was never known to have a dollar in his life, to swear an oath, or drink a drop of spirits. As to his ignorance, he certainly never had the advantages of education; but he can read and write, and for natural intelligence and quickness of apprehension, is surpassed by few men I have ever seen. As to his being a coward, his reason, as given, for not resisting Mr. Phipps, shows the decision of his character. When he saw Mr. Phipps present his gun, he said he knew it was impossible for him to escape, as the woods were full of men; he therefore thought it was better for him to surrender, and trust to fortune for his escape. He is a complete fanatic, or plays his part most admirably. On other subjects he possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining any thing, but warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions. He is below the ordinary stature, though strong and active; having the true negro face, every feature of which is strongly marked. I shall not attempt to describe the effect of his narrative, as told and commented on by himself, in the condemned hole of the prison; the calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of his late deeds and intentions; the expressions of his fiend-like face, when excited by enthusiasm—still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless

52. Brown now quotes from Gray's assessment of Turner in *The Confessions of Nat Turner;* it follows Turner's first-person narrative.

innocence about him, clothed with rags and covered with chains, yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him, and the blood curdled in my veins."

Well might he feel the blood curdle in his veins, when he remembered that in every southern household there may be a Nat Turner, in whose soul God has lighted a torch of liberty that cannot be extinguished by the hand of man. The slaveholder should understand that he lives upon a volcano, which may burst forth at any moment, and give freedom to his victim.

> "Great God, hasten on the glad jubilee,
> When my brother in bonds shall arise and be free,
> And our blotted escutcheon be washed from its stains,
> Now the scorn of the world — four millions in chains!
> O, then shall Columbia's proud flag be unfurled,
> The glory of freemen, and pride of the world,
> While earth's strolling millions point hither in glee,
> 'To the land of the brave and the home of the free!'"

Fifty-five whites and seventy-three blacks lost their lives in the Southampton rebellion.[53] On the fatal night when Nat and his companions were dealing death to all they found, Captain Harris, a wealthy planter, had his life saved by the devotion and timely warning of his slave Jim, said to have been half-brother to his master. After the revolt had been put down, and parties of whites were out hunting the suspected blacks, Captain Harris, with his faithful slave, went into the woods in search of the negroes. In saving his master's life, Jim felt that he had done his duty, and could not consent to become a betrayer of his race, and, on reaching the woods, he handed his pistol to his master, and said, "I cannot help you hunt down these men; they, like myself, want to be free. Sir, I am tired of the life of a slave; please give me my freedom, or

53. Most historians today believe, with Brown, that more blacks died in the savage reaction to the insurrection than whites in the actual rebellion, with the total number of black casualties exceeding one hundred.

shoot me on the spot." Captain Harris took the weapon and pointed it at the slave. Jim, putting his right hand upon his heart, said, "This is the spot; aim here." The captain fired, and the slave fell dead at his foot.

From this insurrection, and other manifestations of insubordination by the slave population, the southern people, if they are wise, should learn a grave lesson; for the experience of the past might give them some clew to the future.

Thirty years' free discussion has materially changed public opinion in the non-slaveholding states, and a negro insurrection, in the present excited state of the nation, would not receive the condemnation that it did in 1831.[54] The right of man to the enjoyment of freedom is a settled point; and where he is deprived of this, without any criminal act of his own, it is his duty to regain his liberty at every cost.

If the oppressor is struck down in the contest, his fall will be a just one, and all the world will applaud the act.

This is a new era, and we are in the midst of the most important crisis that our country has yet witnessed. And in the crisis the negro is an important item. Every eye is now turned towards the south, looking for another Nat Turner.

[Frederick Douglass]

Brown first made the acquaintance of Frederick Douglass in 1843, when both men, still in their twenties, attended the National Negro Conference in Buffalo. Taking advantage of an event in his hometown, Brown was only then formally entering the organized antislavery movement; Douglass, younger by four years, was already an established agent working for William Lloyd Garrison's Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. By the time Brown joined Garrison's group in 1847, Douglass had gone his

54. This assertion, though presumably correct, was simplistic. Even some Northerners feared the possibility of anarchy following emancipation. To take a prominent example, Lincoln was so anxious about black retribution that he stipulated in his Emancipation Proclamation that the freedmen "abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence."

own way, establishing himself in Rochester, New York, setting up an independent antislavery newspaper, and in time splitting bitterly and vociferously with Garrison.

Brown and Douglass were allies in a common cause, not friends. Certainly, Douglass's increasingly acrimonious relationship with Garrison, Brown's protector and ally, and with Garrison's policies made close relations between the two African American leaders difficult, and there were undoubtedly flash points in their dealings during the superheated decade of the 1850s. Just the same, Brown never ceased to hold Douglass in high esteem, as is clear throughout this sketch, which communicates vividly the reaction of contemporaries to Douglass's utterly captivating presence in person and on paper.

The career of the distinguished individual whose name heads this page is more widely known than that of any other living colored man, except, perhaps, Alexandre Dumas.[55] The narrative of his [Douglass's] life, published in 1845, gave a new impetus to the black man's literature.[56] All other stories of fugitive slaves faded away before the beautifully written, highly descriptive, and thrilling memoir of Frederick Douglass. Other narratives had only brought before the public a few heart-rending scenes connected with the person described. But Mr. Douglass, in his book, brought not only his old master's farm and its occupants before the reader, but the entire country around him, including Baltimore and its ship yard. The manner in which he obtained his education, and especially his learning to write, has been read and re-read by thousands in both hemispheres. His escape from slavery is too well understood to need a recapitulation here. He took up his residence in New Bedford,

55. Alexandre Dumas (1802–70) was one of the most popular and prolific French writers of the nineteenth century. His historical novels, especially *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*, enjoyed international acclaim. His paternal grandmother was of African Caribbean origin and had been a slave in Haiti, although it seems that Brown took Dumas's mixed racial heritage more seriously than Dumas generally did.

56. The reference is to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Of the dozens of slave narratives already then in circulation, Douglass's most directly and powerfully influenced Brown's.

where he still continued the assiduous student — mastering the different branches of education which the accursed institution had deprived him of in early life.

His advent as a lecturer was a remarkable one. White men and black men had talked against slavery, but none had ever spoken like Frederick Douglass. Throughout the north the newspapers were filled with the sayings of the "eloquent fugitive." He often travelled with others, but they were all lost sight of in the eagerness to hear Douglass. His travelling companions would sometimes get angry, and would speak first at the meetings; then they would take the last turn; but it was all the same — the fugitive's impression was the one left upon the mind. He made more persons angry, and pleased more, than any other man. He was praised, and he was censured. He made them laugh, he made them weep, and he made them swear. His "Slaveholder's Sermon" was always a trump card.[57] He awakened an interest in the hearts of thousands who before were dead to the slave and his condition. Many kept away from his lectures, fearing lest they should be converted against their will. Young men and women, in those days of pro-slavery hatred, would return to their fathers' roofs filled with admiration for the "runaway slave," and would be rebuked by hearing the old ones grumble out, "You'd better stay at home and study your lessons, and not be running after the nigger meetings."

In 1841, he was induced to accept an agency as a lecturer for the Anti-slavery Society, and at once became one of the most valuable of its advocates. He visited England in 1845. There he was kindly received, and heartily welcomed; and after going through the length and breadth of the land, and addressing public meetings out of number on behalf of his countrymen in chains, with a power of eloquence which captivated his auditors, and brought the cause which he pleaded home to their hearts,

57. A master mimic, Douglass was renowned for the witheringly sarcastic imitation he performed on the antislavery circuit of a proslavery minister preaching the text "Servants, obey your masters."

he returned home and commenced the publication of the *North Star*, a weekly newspaper devoted to the advocacy of the cause of freedom.[58]

Mr. Douglass is tall and well made. His vast and fully-developed forehead shows at once that he is a superior man intellectually. He is polished in his language, and gentlemanly in his manners. His voice is full and sonorous. His attitude is dignified, and his gesticulation is full of noble simplicity. He is a man of lofty reason; natural, and without pretension; always master of himself; brilliant in the art of exposing and abstracting. Few persons can handle a subject, with which they are familiar, better than he. There is a kind of eloquence issuing from the depth of the soul as from a spring, rolling along its copious floods, sweeping all before it, overwhelming by its very force, carrying, upsetting, ingulfing its adversaries, and more dazzling and more thundering than the bolt which leaps from crag to crag. This is the eloquence of Frederick Douglass. One of the best mimics of the age, and possessing great dramatic powers, had he taken up the sock and buskin, instead of becoming a lecturer, he would have made as fine a Coriolanus as ever trod the stage.[59]

In his splendidly conceived comparison of Mr. Douglass to S. R. Ward, written for the "Autographs for Freedom," Professor William J. Wilson says of the former, "In his very look, his gesture, his whole manner, there is so much of genuine, earnest eloquence, that they leave no time for reflection.[60] Now you are reminded of one rushing down some fearful

58. The *North Star* was one of the leading antislavery journals of its day. Brown not only read it but occasionally contributed to it.

59. Sock refers to the shoe worn by and symbolizing ancient comedians, and a buskin was a high-heeled boot worn by Greek tragic actors to give them extra presence. Coriolanus was a political and military leader of ancient Rome, although Brown has more specifically in mind the proud, noble figure in Shakespeare's tragedy *Coriolanus*. Brown's supposition here about Douglass as an onstage Coriolanus is reminiscent of Brown's association when he witnessed Joseph Jenkins playing Othello (see chapter 3).

60. Samuel Ringgold Ward (b. 1817) was among the most powerful African Americans in the antislavery movement. *Autographs for Freedom* (1853), edited by Julia Griffiths, was a collection of mostly antislavery essays with facsimile signatures of its contributors. The major exception in the collection was Douglass's novella *The Heroic Slave*. Brown contributed "Visit of a Fugitive Slave to the Grave of Wilberforce" to the second volume of *Autographs for Freedom* (1854). He included a complimentary sketch of Wilson in *The Black Man*.

steep, bidding you follow; now on some delightful stream, still beckoning you onward. In either case, no matter what your prepossessions or oppositions, you, for the moment at least, forget the justness or unjustness of his cause, and obey the summons, and loath, if at all, you return to your former post. Not always, however, is he successful in retaining you. Giddy as you may be with the descent you have made, delighted as you are with the pleasure afforded, with the Elysium to which he has wafted you, you return too often dissatisfied with his and your own impetuosity and want of firmness. You feel that you had only a dream, a pastime, — not a reality.

"This great power of momentary captivation consists in his eloquence of manners, his just appreciation of words. In listening to him, your whole soul is fired, every nerve strung, every passion inflated, and every faculty you possess ready to perform at a moment's bidding. You stop not to ask why or wherefore. 'Tis a unison of mighty yet harmonious sounds that play upon your imagination; and you give yourself up, for a time, to their irresistible charm. At last, the *cataract* which roared around you is hushed, the *tornado* is passed, and you find yourself sitting upon a bank, (at whose base roll but tranquil waters,) quietly asking yourself why, amid such a display of power, no greater effect had really been produced. After all, it must be admitted there is a power in Mr. Douglass rarely to be found in any other man."

As a speaker, Frederick Douglass has had more imitators than almost any other American, save, perhaps, Wendell Phillips. Unlike most great speakers, he is a superior writer also. Some of his articles, in point of ability, will rank with any thing ever written for the American press. He has taken lessons from the best of teachers, amid the homeliest realities of life; hence the perpetual freshness of his delineations, which are never over-colored, never strained, never aiming at difficult or impossible effects, but which always read like living transcripts of experience. The following, from his pen, on "What shall be done with the slaves, if emancipated?" is characteristic of his style.[61]

61. Douglass published his remarks under this title in *Douglass' Monthly* (January 1862).

"What shall be done with the four million slaves, if they are emancipated? This question has been answered, and can be answered in many ways. Primarily, it is a question less for man than for God — less for human intellect than for the laws of nature to solve. It assumes that nature has erred; that the law of liberty is a mistake; that freedom, though a natural want of the human soul, can only be enjoyed at the expense of human welfare, and that men are better off in slavery than they would or could be in freedom; that slavery is the natural order of human relations, and that liberty is an experiment. What shall be done with them?

"Our answer is, Do nothing with them; mind your business, and let them mind theirs. Your doing with them is their greatest misfortune. They have been undone by your doings, and all they now ask, and really have need of at your hands, is just to let them alone. They suffer by every interference, and succeed best by being let alone. The negro should have been let alone in Africa — let alone when the pirates and robbers offered him for sale in our Christian slave markets (more cruel and inhuman than the Mohammedan slave markets) — let alone by courts, judges, politicians, legislators, and slave-drivers — let alone altogether, and assured that they were thus to be let alone forever, and that they must now make their own way in the world, just the same as any and every other variety of the human family. As colored men, we only ask to be allowed to *do* with ourselves, subject only to the same great laws for the welfare of human society which apply to other men — Jews, Gentiles, Barbarian, Scythian.[62] Let us stand upon our own legs, work with our own hands, and eat bread in the sweat of our own brows. When you, our white fellow-countrymen, have attempted to do any thing for us, it has generally been to deprive us of some right, power, or privilege, which you yourselves would die before you would submit to have taken from you. When the planters of the West Indies used to attempt to puzzle the pure-minded Wilberforce with the question, 'How shall we get rid of slavery?' his simple answer was, 'Quit

62. The Scythians were an ancient nomadic people inhabiting a broad swath of Eurasia stretching across modern-day Ukraine, Russia, and central Asia.

stealing.'[63] In like manner we answer those who are perpetually puzzling their brains with questions as to what shall be done with the negro, 'Let him alone, and mind your own business.' If you see him ploughing in the open field, levelling the forest, at work with a spade, a rake, a hoe, a pickaxe, or a bill — let him alone; he has a right to work. If you see him on his way to school, with spelling-book, geography, and arithmetic in his hands — let him alone. Don't shut the door in his face, nor bolt your gates against him; he has a right to learn — let him alone. Don't pass laws to degrade him. If he has a ballot in his hand, and is on his way to the ballot-box to deposit his vote for the man who, he thinks, will most justly and wisely administer the government which has the power of life and death over him, as well as others — let him ALONE; his right of choice as much deserves respect and protection as your own. If you see him on his way to church, exercising religious liberty in accordance with this or that religious persuasion — let him alone. Don't meddle with him, nor trouble yourselves with any questions as to what shall be done with him.

"What shall be done with the negro, if emancipated? Deal justly with him. He is a human being, capable of judging between good and evil, right and wrong, liberty and slavery, and is as much a subject of law as any other man; therefore, deal justly with him. He is, like other men, sensible of the motives of reward and punishment. Give him wages for his work, and let hunger pinch him if he don't work. He knows the difference between fulness and famine, plenty and scarcity. 'But will he work?' Why should he not? He is used to it, and is not afraid of it. His hands are already hardened by toil, and he has no dreams of ever getting a living by any other means than by hard work. 'But would you turn them all loose?' Certainly! We are no better than our Creator. He has

63. William Wilberforce (1759–1833), English member of Parliament and social activist, was the leader of the antislavery movement in England. Unremittingly dedicated to the cause, he played a central role in bringing about the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire (1807) and eventually the emancipation of slaves throughout the British colonies (1833). Brown followed the custom of many abolitionists of paying a visit to Wilberforce's tomb at Westminster Abbey.

turned them loose, and why should not we? 'But would you let them all stay here?' Why not? What better is *here* than *there*? Will they occupy more room as freemen than as slaves? Is the presence of a black freeman less agreeable than that of a black slave? Is an object of your injustice and cruelty a more ungrateful sight than one of your justice and benevolence? You have borne the one more than two hundred years — can't you bear the other long enough to try the experiment?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Writing African American Civil War History

Brown came only gradually to a position of support for the American Civil War. During the months leading up to and following the outbreak of fighting, he cast a skeptical eye on the policies of the new president. Like most antislavery activists, in spring 1860 Brown had preferred Senator William Seward of New York to the little-known former representative from Illinois as the Republican Party's presidential nominee. Even as Lincoln entered office and the Southern states reacted by seceding from the Union, Brown doubted that an armed conflict would redress the fundamental inequities facing black Americans. For this reason Brown remained as interested in plans for voluntary emigration of African Americans to the Caribbean as in any domestic solution then under discussion. On April 23, 1861, with Fort Sumter recently fallen and the war about to commence, he spoke unsympathetically at Boston's Twelfth Baptist Church about the possibility of recruiting black soldiers into the Union army, fearing their unequal treatment and expressing broad distrust of the Union leadership.[1] Later that year, while working as an agent of Haitian emigration societies, he took his message to places as remote as western New York State and Canada.

He altered his views dramatically, however, once the magnitude of the fighting became apparent and events began to generate a momentum toward radical change. By early 1862 he emerged as an ardent supporter of the

1. "Sentiments of the Colored People of Boston upon the War," *Liberator* 31 (April 26, 1861): 67.

Union cause, with which he now identified the future freedom of both black and white Americans. For the remainder of the conflict Brown labored energetically on behalf of the Union cause. Too old to take an active role in the fighting himself, he did the next best thing: he advocated the incorporation of blacks, both those born into freedom and those recently freed, into the ranks of the Union army. He not only argued the case in journalistic pieces and lectures but also took up the role of military recruiter, as did a number of other prominent blacks. Although he had no sons to give to the Union army, as Frederick Douglass did, Brown worked to sign up volunteers from across the Northeast to the first black regiment organized in his home area, the soon-to-be-renowned Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts.

It seems likely that even during the war Brown was stockpiling material for *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (1867), his pioneering history of the more than two hundred thousand African American soldiers and sailors who served the Union army. As far as is known, he did not travel to the battlefields. Lacking firsthand knowledge, he relied on two sources for his information: what he read and what he heard from contacts. In common with his contemporaries he had access to a staggering amount of reading and viewing material. No previous war had received such extensive media coverage, as large numbers of reporters, photographers, and artists following the troops brought the war home to millions of families in newspaper and magazine articles, telegraphic reports, photographs, illustrations, and cartoons — not to mention, the numerous Civil War histories that began appearing even with the fighting still raging. An inveterate newspaper reader, Brown followed current events during the war even more closely than in the past, when their consequences seemed less immediate. He also stayed in close touch with active and returned soldiers, a task facilitated by his travels as a military recruiter and itinerant lecturer.

Writing the first full-scale account of as controversial a subject as African Americans' service in the Union army, one of the most sensitive issues with which Lincoln had to deal, presented Brown with challenges not limited to the pioneering nature of his undertaking. That he saw those challenges differently than did many of his subsequent critics seems clear from the frequency with which his book has been misunderstood since its publica-

tion. Perhaps the most telling instance of misreading came from the young Charles Chesnutt, who commented upon it in his notebook in 1881: "It only strengthens me in my opinion that the Negro is yet to become known who can write a good book.[2] Dr. Brown's books are mere compilations, and, as Thos. Jefferson says of Phillis Wheatley's poems, 'beneath the dignity of criticism.'[3] If they were not written by a colored man, they would not sell enough to pay for the printing. I read them merely for the facts, but I could appreciate the facts better if they were well presented."[4] Chesnutt's frustration in encountering a "mere compilation" instead of a coherent, synthetic history anticipated the reaction of learned readers ever since, who have decried Brown's black military history as a hasty scissors-and-paste job comprised of miscellaneous, loosely organized materials.

They were (and are) partly correct. Brown had neither the training nor the temperament to write the kind of broadly learned, systematically presented, Civil War history that the talented African American historian George Washington Williams published several decades later.[5] Brown presumably never intended to. He no more set out to write a conventional military his-

2. Charles Chesnutt (1858–1932) was at the time of his reading *The Negro in the American Rebellion* serving as the principal of the Fayetteville (North Carolina) State Normal School for Negroes and preparing himself for a career in letters.

3. The honorific refers to Brown's status as a medical doctor, a profession he practiced from 1863. Chesnutt presumably retrieved this information from the credential Brown attached to his name on the title page of this book (and all subsequent ones).

Chesnutt slightly misquotes Jefferson and also mistakes the object of Jefferson's summary disregard, which was as much collective as personal. A more complete version of Jefferson's dismissal of black poets is this: "Religion has produced a Phyllis Whately [*sic*]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism" (*Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. David Waldstreicher [1785; repr., Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002], 178).

4. Entry of March 17, 1881, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 164.

5. George Washington Williams (1849–91) was one of the premier African American historians of the nineteenth century. A veteran of the Civil War (he was fourteen when he enlisted), he wrote, among other important works, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion* (1888). His stated authorial posture — "to avoid partisan feeling and maintain a spirit of judicial candor" — contrasted sharply with Brown's.

tory than he had set out in his younger years to write a conventional novel or autobiography. In fact, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* had as much in common methodologically, and even in places substantively, with his earlier works as with conventional Civil War histories. Continuing his practice of mixing genres, Brown incorporated elements of fiction and of autobiography—two genres usually considered antithetical to history—into his new project. The result was yet another idiosyncratic volume, one that paid less heed than most readers would have wished to objective, methodical historical representation.

The literary historian John Ernest has commented perceptively about Brown's unconventional mode of writing history: "For Brown . . . literary genres were less conventions to be followed or even reshaped than they were codes of cultural authority and modes of performance."[6] *The Negro in the American Rebellion* was a work that, far from obeying an immediate cultural precedent, invented its own. Perceiving his people as having neither a conventional past nor a past that could be conventionally rendered, Brown applied a radical subjectivity to his contents and the manner of their presentation. The former consisted of Brown's characteristic mishmash, beginning with a consideration of African American participation in earlier American wars and of major slave revolts. Once his focus settled on the Civil War, the content included an impressionistic variety of subjects from both on and off the battlefield, connected only loosely by chronology, geography, or theme.

Some of its subject matter could be found in standard white Civil War histories, such as accounts of major battles, but for the most part the book gave its attention to the activities of African American soldiers and civilians, such as the massacre of black prisoners of war at Fort Pillow, Tennessee; the combat exploits of black regiments in various theaters; the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation on the black community; the consequences of the Northern military victory and the abolition of slavery for black people; and particular acts of black heroism and victimization. Not satisfied simply to document these matters, Brown also allowed a wide variety of black people

6. John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 334.

to speak, whether soldiers involved in the fighting or civilians (male and female alike) who had been affected by it. Brown's manner of presentation replaced the conventional commanding, centralized narrative perspective with a shifting narrative gaze that moved freely across the Civil War landscape with no explicit logic. In perhaps its boldest deviation from historiographical norms and methods, Brown interspersed snippets of autobiography throughout the volume, as though deliberately weaving his personal thread into its multigeneric fabric. Little wonder, then, that critics in his day and ours have often been frustrated in reading this book as history. It seems likely, however, that general readers found serious value in it: it had strong contemporary sales and a long life in print (Chesnutt presumably read a copy of the 1880 reprinting).

Brown published the book in 1867 with the prestigious house of Lee and Shepard, located in Boston but active in the trade nationally. That transaction was his first in the United States with an all-purpose commercial publisher, a break with his previous practice — and that of nearly all contemporaneous African American writers — of bringing out their books with fellow-traveler publishers or small-scale printers, often at their own expense. Lee and Shepard was at the time one of the leading sellers of children's books and photographic albums in the country, but it also had a presence in two fields that intersected in *The Negro in the American Rebellion*: radical literature and Civil War history. Its commitment to radical literature was strong. Soon after publication of *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, it brought out Frank Rollin's *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, and during the next decade it brought out editions of the writings of the radical Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner, the progressive educator Horace Mann, and Brown's fellow abolitionist Wendell Phillips (to whom Brown dedicated his Civil War history). The company also published a wide variety of Civil War and military histories, both during the war and in its immediate aftermath, though nothing even remotely similar to *The Negro in the American Rebellion*.

The chapter numbers and titles are Brown's.

SELECTIONS FROM

The Negro in the American Rebellion

Preface

Brown's preface to *The Negro in the American Rebellion* reveals as much of his motivation and working method as his work ever does—although not nearly as much as one would wish. His stated motivation in writing the book was consistent with his general pattern of defending the reputation of his people and making a case for their right to full participation in American life. So was his working method, so informal in its subject selection and organization as perhaps to seem arbitrary. Extending his coverage of black military service backward to include earlier conflicts "occurred" to him, he says, as being "not . . . uninteresting to the reader"—when, in point of fact, doing so bolstered his defense against the defamatory attack frequently made about the mental and physical fitness of African Americans for military service.

He took his information, as he says, from wherever he could find it. His claim that many books had already been written about the Civil War is entirely accurate; Civil War histories began flying off the press even before the war's outcome was predictable. Some quickly proved best sellers, and the genre was itself so popular that it affected the overall field of publishing, setting into operation a new group of upstart subscription publishers doing business not through established retail outlets but through agents in the field.[1] Brown's claim, however, that no previous work met his specifications is reasonably correct; *The Negro in the American Rebellion* was and remains a distinctive kind of military history.

Feeling anxious to preserve for future reference an account of the part which the Negro took in suppressing the Slaveholders' Rebellion, I have

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The text of the following selections comes from the first edition: *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1867).

1. For an informative analysis of the outpouring of Civil War histories, see Alice Fahs, "The Market Value of Memory: Popular War Histories and the Northern Literary Marketplace, 1861–1868," *Book History* 1 (1998): 107–39. Brown's work participated in this literary outpouring but also stood out conspicuously in subject and method from competing books.

been induced to write this work.[2] In doing so, it occurred to me that a sketch of the condition of the race previous to the commencement of the war would not be uninteresting to the reader.

For the information concerning the services which the blacks rendered to the Government in the Revolutionary War, I am indebted to the late George Livermore, Esq., whose "Historical Research" is the ablest work ever published on the early history of the negroes of this country.[3]

In collecting facts connected with the Rebellion, I have availed myself of the most reliable information that could be obtained from newspaper correspondents, as well as from those who were on the battle-field. To officers and privates of several of the colored regiments I am under many obligations for detailed accounts of engagements.

No doubt, errors in fact and in judgment will be discovered, which I shall be ready to acknowledge, and correct in subsequent editions. The work might have been swelled to double its present size; but I did not feel bound to introduce an account of every little skirmish in which colored men were engaged.

I waited patiently, before beginning this work, with the hope that some one more competent would take the subject in hand; but, up to the present, it has not been done, although many books have been written upon the Rebellion.

Chapter 15

Proclamation of Freedom

This important chapter offers Brown's commentary on the long-awaited event that would change the course of African American history. Despite urgings from major white and black leaders to free the slaves, Lincoln had delayed taking decisive ac-

2. Labeling the conflict the "Slaveholders' Rebellion" put the onus for its inception on the South. The semantic battle about naming the war continued for decades after its military conclusion, as did the historiographic battle about its causes and meaning.

3. The recently deceased George Livermore (1809–65) was a well-known antiquarian and book collector, as well as a fellow resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Livermore published

tion and prohibited his battlefield commanders from doing so during the first year of combat. Although he objected morally to slavery, he also objected to abolitionism as a violation of the Constitution's protection of property. More to the point, he steadfastly adhered to an alternative purpose in undertaking the war: to preserve the Union. As he famously retorted on August 22, 1862, to Horace Greeley's public letter in the *New-York Tribune* urging immediate emancipation, "If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union."

In actuality, Lincoln was at the time already prepared to issue a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, limited to freeing the slaves of those states then in active rebellion. His principles remained unchanged in summer 1862, but the unanticipated scale of the fighting and destruction transformed his thinking. Even as he parried Greeley in print, Lincoln was awaiting encouraging news from his battlefield commanders to bolster his political standing. Indeed, he had been awaiting such news for a prolonged interlude, as the Union army reeled from repeated defeats earlier in the year and was forced into a defensive posture against General Robert E. Lee's Army of Virginia. The positive word Lincoln had awaited for weeks finally came in mid-September when the Union army won a partial victory at Antietam, Maryland, in one of the bloodiest battles in the history of nineteenth-century warfare. That victory blunted Lee's first foray into the North and strengthened Lincoln's hand both militarily and politically. Emboldened by the victory, he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation five days later, on September 22, 1862. It declared that any person held as a slave in rebellious states would be free as of January 1, 1863.

Despite the exclusion of the border states (including Kentucky and Missouri, the states where Brown himself was held in bondage) from the provisions of the proclamation, abolitionists reacted joyously to its declaration. Brown was one among hundreds who took part in the exuberant celebration held at Boston's Tremont

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his well-regarded *An Historical Research Respecting the Founders of the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens, and as Soldiers* (1862) as an affirmative response to the controversy about whether African Americans were suited to military service. Lincoln consulted the work as he was drafting the Emancipation Proclamation and gave his signing pen to Senator Charles Sumner, who in turn gave it to Livermore. Brown, for his part, not only complimented the book but consulted it in his own writing.

Temple on January 1, 1863, where he read the text of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation to the expectant crowd. That activity was part of a series of gatherings that took place across the city in what turned into an all-day, all-night vigil. Not until nearly midnight did he and a crowd that included Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Harriet Beecher Stowe receive confirmation that Lincoln had earlier that day signed into law the final Emancipation Proclamation, whose text was transmitted within hours by telegraph to cities around the country.

The centerpiece of this chapter is of course the Emancipation Proclamation, whose controversial history Brown carefully recited and whose entire text he printed as its penultimate topic.[4] But Brown was also meticulous in situating the document in a specifically African American context, as the voices of the soon-to-be-freed people converse, chant, pray, speak in anticipation of, and finally — in the poem of Frances Ellen Harper — speak back to this historic document.

On the 22d of September, 1862, President Lincoln sent forth his proclamation, warning the rebel States that he would proclaim emancipation to their slaves if such States did not return to the Union before the first day of the following January.[5] Loud were the denunciations of the copperheads of the country; and all the stale arguments against negro emancipation which had been used in the West Indies thirty years before, and since then in our country, were newly vamped, and put forward to frighten the President and his Cabinet.[6]

The toleration of a great social wrong in any country is ever accompanied by blindness of vision, hardness of heart, and cowardice of mind, as well as moral deterioration and industrial impoverishment. Hence,

4. One may contrast the treatment Brown gives the Emancipation Proclamation here with that given to the Gettysburg Address by Benson J. Lossing in his popular *Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America*, 3 vols. (Hartford, Conn.: Belknap, 1866–68), where he relegates its text to a footnote (3:80n3).

5. Lincoln approached the issue of emancipation hesitatingly on both political and ideological grounds. When he finally did issue his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, he limited its provisions to those states then in active rebellion against the Union.

6. *Copperheads* was a term of derision applied by war supporters to Northerners who supported the South and/or opposed the war, as well as more collectively to Northern members of the Democratic Party, even though many eventually sided with the Union.

whenever an earnest attempt is made for the removal of the wrong, those without eyes noisily declare that they see clearly that nothing but disastrous consequences will follow; those who are dead to all sensibility profess to be shocked beyond measure in contemplating the terrible scenes that must result from the change; and those who have no faith in justice are thrown into spasms at the mention of impartial administration. For a whole generation, covering the period of the antislavery struggle in this country, have they not incessantly raised their senseless clamors and indignant outcries against the simplest claim of bleeding humanity to be released from its tortures, as though it were a proposition to destroy all order, inaugurate universal ruin, and "let chaos come again"?

"The proclamation won't reach the slaves," said one. "They won't heed it," said another.

"This proclamation is an invitation to the blacks to murder their masters," remarked a Boston copperhead newspaper.[7] "The slaves will fight for their masters," said the same journal the following day.

"It will destroy the Union." — "It is harmless and impotent." — "It will excite slave insurrection." — "The slaves will never hear of it." — "It will excite the South to desperation." — "The rebels will laugh it to scorn."

Delegation after delegation waited on the President, and urged postponement of emancipation. The Kentucky Congressional delegation did all in their power to put back the glorious event.[8] Conservative old-line Whigs and backsliding antislavery men were afraid to witness the coming day.

"Abraham, spare the South,
Touch not a single slave,
Nor e'en by word of mouth
Disturb the thing, we crave.

7. The historic pattern of affiliation between newspapers and political parties continued during the Civil War. Even in Boston, a stronghold of Union sentiment, a small minority of newspapers persisted in attacking the war and its declared goals.

8. Kentucky was a border state that refused to join the Confederacy but that legally maintained slavery until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (on December 6, 1865). It was the birthplace of a number of prominent slaves, including Henry Bibb, Margaret Garner, the brothers Lewis and Milton Clarke, and the fictional Uncle Tom — not to mention, Brown himself.

'Twas our forefathers' hand
That slavery begot:
There, Abraham, let it stand;
Thine acts shall harm it not," —[9]

cried thousands who called at the White House. Washington, Alexandria, and Georgetown were crowded with "contrabands"; and hundreds were forwarded to the Sea Islands, to be occupied in cultivating the deserted plantations.[10] As the day drew near, reports were circulated that the President would re-call the pledge. The friends of the negro were frightened; the negro himself trembled for fear that the cause would be lost. The blacks in all the Southern departments were behaving well, as if to deepen the already good impression made by them on the Government officials. Rejoicing meetings were advertised at the Tremont Temple, Boston; Cooper Institute, New York, and the largest hall in Philadelphia, and in nearly every city and large town in the north. Great preparation was made at the "Contraband Camp," and in the District of Columbia.[11] At the latter place, they met on the last night in December, 1862, in the camp, and waited patiently for the coming day, when they should become free. The forepart of the night was spent in singing and prayer, the following being sung several times: —

9. This song was a takeoff on the 1830 poem "Woodman, Spare That Tree" by the American journalist George Pope Morris (1802–64). Fitted to music in 1837, it became an immensely popular song that has been adapted and parodied ever since.

10. *Contrabands* was the term in popular use to delineate the hundreds of thousands of slaves made refugees during the Civil War. Their swelling numbers rendered determination of their status an urgent necessity for political and military leaders.

The Sea Islands are a one-hundred-mile chain of barrier islands stretching from the southern coast of South Carolina to the northern coast of Georgia. The largest of them, Hilton Head, was captured by the Union army in November 1861 and became one of its first beachheads. Shortly afterward the thirty-three thousand local slaves were freed, schools were established, and recruitment of freedmen into the first black regiment of the Union army was begun.

11. All across the South, African American refugees gathered in makeshift communities numbering in the hundreds or thousands, generally in the vicinity and under the protection of Union army units. The large refugee camp mentioned here was situated within the borders of the District of Columbia, itself not far removed from the battlefield.

"Oh, go down, Moses,
Way down into Egypt's land;
Tell king Pharaoh
To let my people go.

Oh, Pharaoh said he would go cross,
Let my people go.
But Pharaoh and his host was lost,
Let my people go.
Chorus — Oh, go down, Moses, etc.

O Moses, stretch your hands across,
Let my people go.
And don't get lost in the wilderness,
Let my people go.
Chorus — Oh, go down, Moses, etc.

You may hinder me here, but you can't up there,
Let my people go.
He sits in heaven, and answers prayer,
Let my people go.
Chorus — Oh, go down, Moses, etc."[12]

After this an old man struck up, in a clear and powerful voice, "I am a free man now: Jesus Christ has made me free!" the company gradually joining in; and, before the close, the whole assemblage was singing in chorus.

It was quite evident, through the exercises of the day and night, that the negroes regard the condition of the Israelites in Egypt as typical of their own condition in slavery; and the allusion to Moses, Pharaoh, the Egyptian taskmasters, and the unhappy condition of the captive

12. The song was (and remains) one of the most popular of the nineteenth-century Negro spirituals. Its underlying reference is to the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land (Exodus 3:14).

Israelites, were continuous; and any reference to the triumphant escape of the Israelites across the Red Sea, and the destruction of their pursuing masters was certain to bring out a strong "Amen!"

An old colored preacher, who displays many of the most marked peculiarities of his race, calling himself "John de Baptist," and known as such by his companions, from his habit of always taking his text, as he expresses it, from the "regulations ob de 2d chapter of Matthew, 'And in those days came John de Baptist,'" came forward, and, taking his usual text, went on to show the necessity of following good advice, and rebuked his hearers for being more lawless than they were in Dixie.[13]

Then came another contraband brother, who said,—

"Onst, the time was dat I cried all night. What's de matter? What's de matter? Matter enough. De nex mornin' my child was to be sold, an' she was sold; an' I neber spec to see her no more till de day ob judgment. Now, no more dat! no more dat! no more dat! Wid my hands agin my breast I was gwine to my work, when de overseer used to whip me along. Now, no more dat! no more dat! no more dat! When I tink what de Lord's done for us, an' brot us thro' de trubbles, I feel dat I ought go inter his service. We'se free now, bress de Lord! (Amens! were vociferated all over the building.) Dey can't sell my wife an' child any more, bress de Lord! (Glory, glory! from the audience.) No more dat! no more dat! no more dat, now! (Glory!) Presurdund Lincum hav shot de gate! Dat's what de matter!" and there was a prolonged response of Amens!

A woman on her knees exclaimed at the top of her voice,—

> "If de Debble do not ketch
> Jeff. Davis, dat infernal retch,
> An roast and frigazee dat rebble,
> What is de use ob any Debble?"

"Amen! amen! amen!" cried many voices.

13. Brown's slight mistake: the quotation comes from Matthew 3:1.

At this juncture of the meeting an intelligent contraband broke out in the following strain:—

"The first of January next, eighteen sixty-three,—
So says the Proclamation,—the slaves will all be free!
To every kindly heart 'twill be the day of jubilee;
For the bond shall all go free![14]

John Brown, the dauntless hero, with joy is looking on;
From his home among the angels he sees the coming dawn;
Then up with Freedom's banners, and hail the glorious morn
When the slaves shall all go free!

We've made a strike for liberty; the Lord is on our side;
And Christ, the friend of bondmen, shall ever be our guide;
And soon the cry will ring, throughout this glorious land so wide,
'Let the bondmen all go free!'

No more from crushed and bleeding hearts we hear the broken sigh;
No more from brothers bound in chains we'll hear the pleading cry;
For the happy day, the glorious day, is coming by and by,
When the slaves shall all go free!

We're bound to make our glorious flag the banner of the free,
The first of January next, eighteen sixty-three;
Of every loyal Northern heart the glad cry then shall be,
'Let the bondmen all go free!'

'NO COMPROMISE WITH SLAVERY!'[15] we hear the cheering sound,
The road to peace and happiness 'Old Abe' at last has found:
With earnest hearts and willing hands to stand by him we're bound,
While he sets the bondmen free!

14. The term *jubilee* descended to African American history from biblical practice, which held that every fiftieth year was a time of liberation and restoration that included the freeing of Hebrew slaves.

15. "No compromise with slavery" was the long-standing rallying cry of William Lloyd Garrison and his movement.

The morning light is breaking: we see its cheering ray,—
The light of Truth and Justice, that can never fade away;
And soon the light will brighten to a great and glorious day,
When the slaves shall all go free!

And when we on the 'other side' do all together stand,
As children of one family we'll clasp the friendly hand:
We'll be a band of brothers in that brighter, better land,
Where the bond shall all be free!"[16]

After several others had spoken, George Payne, another contraband, made a few sensible remarks, somewhat in these words: "Friends, don't you see de han' of God in dis? Haven't we a right to rejoice? You all know you couldn't have such a meetin' as dis down in Dixie! Dat you all knows. I have a right to rejoice; an' so have you; for we shall be free in jus' about five minutes. Dat's a fact. I shall rejoice dat God has placed Mr. Lincum in de president's chair, and dat he wouldn't let de rebels make peace until after dis new year. De Lord has heard de groans of de people, and has come down to deliver! You all knows dat in Dixie you worked de day long, an' never got no satisfacshun. But here, what you make is yourn. I've worked six months; and what I've made is mine! Let me tell you, though, don't be too free! De lazy man can't go to heaven. You must be honest, an' work, an' show dat you is fit to be free; an' de Lord will bless you an' Abrum Lincum. Amen!"

A small black man, with a rather cracking voice, appearing by his gestures to be inwardly on fire, began jumping and singing the following:—

"And Massa gone, missy too;
Cry! niggers, cry!
Tink I'll see de bressed Norf,
'Fore de day I die.

16. The popular phrase for a closely knit group of comrades originates in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, 4.3.60.

Hi! hi! Yankee shot 'im;
Now I tink de debbil's got 'im."

The whole company then joined in singing the annexed song, which made the welkin ring, and was heard far beyond the camp.

I

"Oh! we all longed for freedom,
Oh! we all longed for freedom,
Oh! we all longed for freedom,
Ah! we prayed to be free;
Yes, we prayed to be free,
Oh, we prayed to be free,
Though the day was long in coming,
Though the day was long in coming,
Though the day was long in coming,
That we so longed to see,
That we so longed to see,
That we so longed to see,
Though the day was long in coming
That we so longed to see.

II

But bless the great Jehovah,
But bless the great Jehovah,
But bless the great Jehovah,
At last the glad day's come,
At last the glad day's come,
At last the glad day's come.
By fire and sword he brought us,
By fire and sword he brought us,
By fire and sword he brought us,
From slavery into freedom,

From slavery into freedom,
From slavery into freedom;
By fire and sword he brought us
From slavery into freedom.

III

We'll bless the great Redeemer,
We'll bless the great Redeemer,
We'll bless the great Redeemer,
And glorify his name,
And glorify his name,
And glorify his name,
And all who helped to bring us,
And all who helped to bring us,
And all who helped to bring us
From sorrow, grief, and shame,
From sorrow, grief, and shame,
From sorrow, grief, and shame,
And all who helped to bring us
From sorrow, grief, and shame.

IV

And blessed be Abraham Lincoln,
And blessed be Abraham Lincoln,
And blessed be Abraham Lincoln,
And the Union army too,
And the Union army too.
May the choicest of earth's blessings,
May the choicest of earth's blessings,
May the choicest of earth's blessings,
Their pathways ever strew,
Their pathways ever strew,

Their pathways ever strew!
May the choicest of earth's blessings
Their pathways ever strew!

V

We'll strive to learn our duty,
We'll strive to learn our duty,
We'll strive to learn our duty,
That all our friends may see,
That all our friends may see,
That all our friends may see,
Though so long oppressed in bondage,
Though so long oppressed in bondage,
Though so long oppressed in bondage,
We were worthy to be free,
We were worthy to be free,
We were worthy to be free:
Though so long oppressed in bondage,
We were worthy to be free."

Just before midnight, Dr. Nichols requested all present to kneel, and to silently invoke the blessing of the Almighty.[17] The silence was almost deadly when the clock announced the new year; and Dr. Nichols said, "Men and women (for you are this day to be declared free, and I can address you as men and women), I wish you a happy new year!" An eloquent prayer was then offered by an aged negro; after which, all rose, and joined in singing their version of "Glory! glory! hallelujah!" shaking each other by the hand, and indulging in joyous demonstrations. They then promenaded the grounds, singing hymns, and finally serenaded the superintendent, in whose honor a sable improvisator carolled forth an original ode, the chorus of which was, "Free forever! Forever free!"

17. D. B. Nichols was the superintendent of this large refugee camp in Washington, D.C.

"Ring, ring! O Bell of Freedom, ring!
And to the ears of bondsmen bring
Thy sweet and freeman-thrilling tone.
On Autumn's blast, from zone to zone,
The joyful tidings go proclaim,
In Liberty's hallowed name:
Emancipation to the slave,
The rights which his Creator gave,
To live with chains asunder riven,
To live free as the birds of heaven,
To live free as the air he breathes,
Entirely free from galling graves;
The right to act, to know, to feel,
That bands of iron and links of steel
Were never wrought to chain the mind,
Nor human flesh in bondage bind;
That Heaven in its generous plan,
Gave like and equal rights to man.
Go send thy notes from shore to shore,
Above the deep-voiced cannon's roar;
Go send Emancipation's peal
Where clashes North with Southern steel,
And nerve the Southern bondmen now
To rise and strike the final blow,
To lay oppression's minions low.
Oh! rouse the mind and nerve the arm
To brave the blast and face the storm;
And, ere the war-cloud passes by,
We'll have a land of liberty.

Our God has said, 'Let there be light
Where Error palls the land with night.'
Then send forth now, O Freedom's bell,
Foul Slavery's last and fatal knell!

Oh speed the tidings o'er the land,
That tells that stern Oppression's hand
Has yielded to the power of Right:
That Wrong is weak, that Truth is might!

. . . . . .

Then Union shall again return,
And Freedom's fires shall brightly burn;
And PEACE and JOY, sweet guests, shall come,
And dwell in every heart and home."

"Free forever! Forever free!"

No pen can fitly portray the scene that followed this announcement. Every heart seemed to leap for joy: some were singing, some praying, some weeping, some dancing, husbands embracing wives, friends shaking hands, and appearing to feel that the Day of Jubilee had come. A sister broke out in the following strain, which was heartily joined in by the vast assembly:-

"Go down, Abraham, away down in Dixie's land,
Tell Jeff. Davis to let my people go.
Our bitter tasks are ended, all our unpaid labor done;
Our galling chains are broken, and our onward march begun:
Go down, Abraham, away down in Dixie's land,
Tell Jeff. Davis to let my people go.
Down in the house of bondage we have watched and waited long;
The oppressor's heel was heavy, the oppressor's arm was strong:
Go down, Abraham, away down in Dixie's land,
Tell Jeff. Davis to let my people go.

Not vainly have we waited through the long and darkened years;
Not vain the patient watching, 'mid our sweat and blood and tears:
Go down, Abraham, away down in Dixie's land,
Tell Jeff. Davis to let my people go.

Now God is with Grant, and he'll surely whip Lee;
For the Proclamation says that the niggers must be free:
Go down, Abraham, away down in Dixie's land,
Tell Jeff. Davis to let my people go."

Thus ended the last night of slavery in the contraband camp at Washington.

The morning of Jan. 1, 1863, was anxiously looked for by the friends of freedom throughout the United States; and, during the entire day, the telegraph offices in the various places were beset by crowds, waiting to hear the news from the Nation's capital. Late in the day the following proclamation made its appearance:—

Washington, Jan. 1, 1863.—I Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, do issue this my Proclamation:—

Whereas, On the 22d day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three,[18] a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:—

"That, on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or any designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, henceforward, and forever, free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval force thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any effort they may make for their actual freedom;[19] that the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people therein respectively shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State or people thereof shall on that

18. Brown's transcription of the Emancipation Proclamation is riddled with errors. Here the date should be 1862. Other serious mistakes are identified in the next two notes.

19. Lincoln's text began a new paragraph at this point.

day be in good faith represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto, at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such States shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State and the people thereof are not then in rebellion against the United States.

"Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States in times of actual rebellion against the authorities and Government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing this rebellion, do on this, the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do, publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days from the date of the first above-mentioned order, do designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof, respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States. The following, to wit:—

"Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.[20]

"Louisiana (except the parishes of St. Bernard, Placquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terre Bonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the city of New Orleans), Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, except the forty eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Anne, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth, which excepted parts are for the present left precisely as if this proclamation were not made.

"And by virtue of the power, for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and

20. This paragraph listing the ten states in rebellion does not exist in the Emancipation Proclamation. It is not clear why Brown added it, since the next paragraph renders it superfluous.

parts of States are, and henceforward shall be, FREE; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons.

"And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self defence; and I recommend to them, that, in all cases where allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

"And I further declare and make known, that such persons, if in suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States, to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service. And upon this, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution, and upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

"In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

"Done at the city of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

(Signed) "ABRAHAM LINCOLN.
"By the President.
"Wm. H. Seward, *Secretary of State*."

This was the beginning of a new era: the word had gone forth, and a policy was adopted.

"The deed is done. Millions have yearned
To see the spear of Freedom cast:
The dragon writhed and roared and burned;
You've smote him full and square at last."

The proclamation gave new life and vigor to our men on the battlefield. The bondmen everywhere caught up the magic word, and went with it from farm to farm, and from town to town. Black men flocked to

recruiting stations, and offered themselves for the war. Everybody saw light in the distance. What newspapers and orators had failed to do in months was done by the proclamation in a single week. Frances Ellen Harper, herself colored, cheered in the following strain:—

"It shall flash through coming ages;
It shall light the distant years;
And eyes now dim with sorrow
Shall be brighter through their tears.

It shall flush the mountain ranges,
And the valleys shall grow bright;
It shall bathe the hills in radiance,
And crown their brows with light.

It shall flood with golden splendor
All the huts of Caroline;
And the sun-kissed brow of labor
With lustre new shall shine.

It shall gild the gloomy prison,
Darkened with the age's crime,
Where the dumb and patient millions
Wait the better coming time.

By the light that gilds their prison,
They shall seize its mouldering key;
And the bolts and bars shall vibrate
With the triumphs of the free.

Like the dim and ancient Chaos,
Shuddering at Creation's light;
Oppression grim and hoary
Shall cower at the sight.

And her spawn of lies and malice
Shall grovel in the dust;

While joy shall thrill the bosoms
Of the merciful and just.

Though the morning seems to linger
O'er the hill-tops far away,
The shadows bear the promise
Of the quickly coming day.

Soon the mists and murky shadows
Shall be fringed with crimson light,
And the glorious dawn of freedom
Break resplendent on the sight."[21]

Chapter 20

Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment

Brown took a heightened interest in the accomplishments of the most publicized of the black regiments, the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts. If slow to warm to the idea of enlisting his fellows in the Union army, once he accepted it, he became an impassioned advocate. The subject of black military service, as he knew, had a fraught history during the early years of the war. Early experiments in enlisting black regiments had been made in South Carolina as well as out West, with mixed results militarily and politically. Once Lincoln broke his self-imposed barrier with the Emancipation Proclamation, which authorized the principle of black military service, intensive recruitment began.

The organization of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts followed swiftly. By February 1863 Governor John Andrew had taken initial steps to commission the new infantry unit, with prominent black leaders (including Brown, Douglass, Delany, and Henry Highland Garnet) enlisted to help with the recruitment. Within a matter of months the unit was manned, trained, and deployed to active duty in South Carolina.

In this episode Brown not only portrays the formal celebration of the unit in Boston's public square but demonstratively enters the unit into the public record. A few chapters later ("Assault on Fort Wagner") he would return to track the unit to its

21. "President Lincoln's Proclamation of Freedom," by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911), a popular, widely published African American poet, novelist, and social activist.

ill-fated assault on Fort Wagner, near Charleston, South Carolina, where it sustained heavy losses.

The Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was called into the service of the United States by the President, under an act of Congress, passed July 21, 1861, entitled "An Act to authorize the Employment of Volunteers to aid in enforcing the Laws and protecting Public Property." Recruiting began Feb. 9, 1863, in Boston. A camp of rendezvous was opened at "Camp Meigs," Readville, Mass., on the 21st of February, with a squad of twenty-seven men; and, by the end of March, five companies were recruited, comprising four hundred and fourteen men.[22] This number was doubled during April; and, on the 12th of May, the regiment was full.

Orders being received for it to proceed to the Department of the South, the regiment broke camp on the 28th of May, and took cars for Boston. After passing through the principal streets, and reaching the Common, they prepared to receive the colors which were to be presented by the Governor.

The regiment was formed in a hollow square, the distinguished persons present occupying the centre. The flags were four in number, comprising a national flag, presented by young colored ladies of Boston; a national ensign, presented by the "Colored Ladies' Relief Society"; an emblematic banner, presented by ladies and gentlemen of Boston, friends of the regiment; and a flag presented by relatives and friends of the late Lieut. Putnam.[23] The emblematic banner was of white silk, handsomely embroidered, having on one side a figure of the Goddess of Justice, with the words, "Liberty, Loyalty, and Unity," around it. The fourth flag bore

22. Readville was an outlying neighborhood of Boston; Camp Meigs was the area's main training camp for Union army soldiers.

23. Lieutenant William Lowell Putnam (1840–61) served alongside other sons of leading Boston families in the Twentieth Massachusetts Infantry, one of the most distinguished units in the Army of the Potomac. After he was killed in battle just a few months into the conflict, his name became a byword in the North for selfless devotion.

a cross with a blue field, surmounted with the motto, "In hoc signo vinces."[24] All were of the finest texture and workmanship.

Prayer having been offered by the Rev. Mr. Grimes, Gov. Andrew presented the various flags, with the following speech: —[25]

Presentation Speech of Gov. Andrew

"Col. Shaw, — as the official representative of the Commonwealth, and by favor of various ladies and gentlemen, citizens of the Commonwealth, and friends of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, I have the honor and the satisfaction of being permitted to join you this morning for the purpose of presenting to your regiment the national flag, the State colors of Massachusetts, and the emblematic banner which the cordial, generous, and patriotic friendship of its patrons has seen fit to present to you.[26]

"Two years of experience in all the trials and vicissitudes of war, attended with the repeated exhibition of Massachusetts regiments marching from home to the scenes of strife, have left little to be said or suggested

24. Latin: "In this sign thou shalt conquer." The phrase was associated originally with the vision of the cross experienced by the Roman emperor Constantine (285–337 CE) on the eve of battle. It has been widely invoked in subsequent centuries, often in the context of battle.

25. Leonard Grimes (1815–73) was the much-respected pastor of the Twelfth Baptist Church (which its members also called the Fugitive Slave Church) of Boston. A coactivist with Brown in Boston-area antislavery activity and long-time friend, Grimes officiated at Brown's marriage to Anna Elizabeth Gray on April 12, 1860.

Governor John Andrew (1818–67), a committed abolitionist, served as governor of Massachusetts from 1861 to 1866. He vigorously promoted the incorporation of blacks into the Union army, beginning with the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts.

26. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (1837–63), scion of a leading Boston family, was a seasoned army officer when offered the command of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts. He trained and prepared the regiment for battle, then died while leading it on the unsuccessful assault on Fort Wagner, outside Charleston, South Carolina. Despite the heavy losses incurred and the lack of any military advantage gained, the battle earned Shaw posthumous fame and its African American combatants renown in some parts of the North.

which could give the interest of novelty to an occasion like this. But, Mr. Commander, one circumstance pertaining to the composition of the Fifty-fourth Regiment, exceptional in its character when compared with any thing we have seen before, gives to this hour an interest and importance, solemn and yet grand, because the occasion marks an era in the history of the war, of the Commonwealth, of the country, and of humanity. I need not dwell upon the fact that the enlisted men constituting the rank and file of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers are drawn from a race not hitherto connected with the fortunes of the war. And yet I cannot forbear to allude to the circumstance, because I can but contemplate it for a brief moment, since it is uppermost in your thoughts, and since this regiment, which for many months has been the desire of my own heart, is present now before this vast assembly of friendly citizens of Massachusetts, prepared to vindicate by its future, as it has already begun to do by its brief history of camp-life here, to vindicate in its own person and in the presence, I trust, of all who belong to it, the character, the manly character, the zeal, the manly zeal, of the colored citizens of Massachusetts and of those other States which have cast their lot with ours. (Applause.)

"I owe to you, Mr. Commander, and to the officers who, associated with you, have assisted in the formation of this noble corps, composed of men selected from among their fellows for fine qualities of manhood, — I owe to you, sir, and to those of your associates who united with me in the original organization of this body, the heartiest and most emphatic expression of my cordial thanks. I shall follow you, Mr. Commander, your officers, and your men, with a friendly and personal solicitude, to say nothing of official care, which can hardly be said of any other corps which has marched from Massachusetts. My own personal honor, if I have any, is identified with yours. I stand or fall, as a man and a magistrate, with the rise or fall in the history of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment. (Applause.) I pledge not only in behalf of myself, but of all those whom I have the honor to represent to-day, the utmost generosity, the utmost kindness, the utmost devotion of hearty love, not only for the cause, but for you that represent it. We will follow your fortunes in the

camp and in the field with the anxious eyes of brethren and the proud hearts of citizens.

"To those men of Massachusetts, and of surrounding States who have now made themselves citizens of Massachusetts, I have no word to utter fit to express the emotions of my heart. These men, sir, have now, in the Providence of God, given to them an opportunity which, while it is personal to themselves, is still an opportunity for a whole race of men. (Applause.) With arms possessed of might to strike a blow, they have found breathed into their hearts an inspiration of devoted patriotism, and regard for their brethren of their own color, which has inspired them with a purpose to nerve that arm, that it may strike a blow which, while it shall help to raise aloft their country's flag — *their* country's flag now as well as ours — by striking down the foes which oppose it, strikes also the last blow, I trust, needful to rend the last shackle which binds the limb of the bondman in the rebel States. (Applause.)

"I know not, Mr. Commander, when, in all human history, to any given thousand men in arms there has been given a work so proud, so precious, so full of hope and glory, as the work committed to you. (Applause.) And may the infinite mercy of Almighty God attend you every hour of every day, through all the experiences and vicissitudes of that dangerous life in which you have embarked! may the God of our fathers cover your heads in the day of battle! may he shield you with the arms of everlasting power! may he hold you always most of all, first of all, and last of all, up to the highest and holiest conception of duty; so that if, on the field of stricken fight, your souls shall be delivered from the thraldom of the flesh, your spirits shall go home to God, bearing aloft the exulting thought of duty well performed, of glory and reward won even at the hands of the angels who shall watch over you from above!

"Mr. Commander, you, sir, and most of your officers, have been carefully selected from among the most intelligent and experienced officers who have already performed illustrious service upon the field during the last two years of our national conflict. I need not say, sir, with how much confidence and with how much pride we contemplate the leadership which we know this regiment will receive at your hands. In yourself, sir,

your staff and line officers, we are enabled to declare a confidence which knows no hesitation and no doubt. Whatever fortune may betide you, we know from the past that all will be done for the honor of the cause, for the protection of the flag, for the defence of the right, for the glory of your country, and for the safety and the honor of these men whom we commit to you, that shall lie either in the human heart or brain or arm. (Applause.)

"And now, Mr. Commander, it is my most agreeable duty and high honor to hand to you, as the representative of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers, the American flag, the star-spangled banner of the Republic. Wherever its folds shall be unfurled, it will mark the path of glory. Let its stars be the inspiration of yourselves, your officers, and your men. As the gift of the young ladies of the city of Boston to their brethren in arms, they will cherish it as the lover cherishes the recollection and fondness of his mistress; and the white stripes of its field will be red with their blood before it shall be surrendered to the foe. (Applause.)

"I have also the honor, Mr. Commander, to present to you the State colors of Massachusetts, — the State colors of the old Bay State, borne already by fifty-three regiments of Massachusetts soldiers, white men thus far, now to be borne by the Fifty-fourth Regiment of soldiers, not less of Massachusetts than the others. Whatever may be said, Mr. Commander, of any other flag which has ever kissed the sunlight, or been borne on any field, I have the pride and honor to be able to declare before you, your regiment, and these witnesses, that, from the beginning up till now, the State colors of Massachusetts have never been surrendered to any foe. (Cheers.) The Fifty-fourth now holds in possession this sacred charge in the performance of their duties as citizen-soldiers. You will never part with that flag so long as a splinter of the staff, or a thread of its web, remains within your grasp. (Applause.) The State colors are presented to the Fifty-fourth by the Relief Society, composed of colored ladies of Boston.

"And now let me commit to you this splendid emblematic banner. It is prepared for your acceptance by a large and patriotic committee, rep-

resenting many others beside ladies and gentlemen of Boston, to whose hearty sympathy, and powerful co-operation and aid, much of the success which has hitherto attended the organization of this regiment is due. The Goddess of Liberty, erect in beautiful guise and form (liberty, loyalty, and unity are the emblems it bears), — the Goddess of Liberty shall be the lady-love whose fair presence shall inspire your hearts; liberty, loyalty, unity, the watchwords in the fight.

"And now, Mr. Commander, the sacred, holy cross, representing passion, the highest heroism, I scarcely dare to trust myself to present to you. It is the emblem of Christianity. I have parted with the emblems of the State, of the nation, — heroic, patriotic emblems they are, dear, inexpressibly dear, to all our hearts; but now, *In hoc signo vinces*, the cross which represents the passion of our Lord, I dare to pass into your soldier hands; for we are fighting now a battle not merely for country, not merely for humanity, not only for civilization, but for the religion of our Lord itself. When this cause shall ultimately fall, if ever failure at the last shall be possible, it will only fail when the last patriot, the last philanthropist, and the last Christian shall have tasted death, and left no descendants behind them upon the soil of Massachusetts. (Applause.)

"This flag, Mr. Commander, has connected with its history the most touching and sacred memory. It comes to your regiment from the mother, sister, friends, family relatives, of one of the dearest and noblest soldier-boys of Massachusetts. I need not utter the name of Lieut. Putnam in order to excite in every heart the tenderest emotions of fond regard, or the strongest feeling of patriotic fire. May you, sir, and these, follow not only on the field of battle, but in all the walks and ways of life, in camp, and hereafter, when, on returning peace, you shall resume the more quiet and peaceful duties of citizens, — may you but follow the splendid example, the sweet devotion mingled with manly, heroic character, of which the life, character, and death of Lieut. Putnam was one example! How many more there are we know not: the record is not yet complete; but, oh! how many there are of these Massachusetts sons, who, like him, have tasted death for this immortal cause! Inspired by such examples, fired by the heat and light of love and faith which illumined and warmed these

heroic and noble hearts, may you, sir, and these, march on to glory, to victory, and to every honor! This flag I present to you, Mr. Commander, and your regiment. In hoc signo vinces.

Response of Col. Shaw.

"*Your Excellency*, — We accept these flags with feelings of deep gratitude. They will remind us not only of the cause we are fighting for, and of our country, but of the friends we have left behind us, who have thus far taken so much interest in this regiment, and who, we know, will follow us in our career. Though the greater number of men in this regiment are not Massachusetts men, I know there is not one who will not be proud to fight and serve under our flag. May we have an opportunity to show that you have not made a mistake in intrusting the honor of the State to a colored regiment! — the first State that has sent one to the war.

"I am very glad to have this opportunity to thank the officers and men of the regiment for their untiring fidelity and devotion to their work from the very beginning. They have shown that sense of the importance of our undertaking, without which we should hardly have attained our end. (Applause.)

At the conclusion of Col. Shaw's remarks, the colors were borne to their place in the line by the guard, and the regiment was reviewed by the Governor. Thence they marched out of the Common, down Tremont Street, down Court Street, by the Court House, chained hardly a decade ago to save slavery and the Union [*sic*].[27] Thence down State Street, trampling on the very pavement over which Sims and Burns marched to their fate, encompassed by soldiers of the United States.[28]

27. After leaving Boston Common, the city's central public square, the regiment parades through the heart of historic Boston.

28. Thomas Sims and Anthony Burns were fugitive slaves arrested and tried as runaways at separate times in Boston under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act. Sims was forcibly returned to slavery in Georgia in 1851; Burns to slavery in Virginia in 1854 (but later liberated after Northern supporters purchased his manumission). The Burns case in particular caused a furor in many parts of the North.

"Their sisters, sweethearts, and wives" — a familiar quotation in the notices of previous departing regiments, but looking a little odd in this new place — ran along beside "the boys," giving their parting benediction of smiles and tears, telling them to be brave, and to show their blood.

They marched in good time, and wheeled with a readiness which showed that they had a clear idea of what was required, and only needed a little more practice to equal the best regiments that left the State.

The regiment marched down State Street at a quarter past twelve o'clock to the tune of "John Brown," and was vociferously cheered by the vast crowds that covered the sidewalks and filled the windows.[29] Nowhere was the reception of the regiment more hearty.

All attempts to express the feeling of the crowd or the soldiers seem to read stale and flat. Yet, as Goldsmith said that the weakest jokes were received as wit by the circle of the happy vicar, so these attempts were treated as successes by the happy crowd.[30] One man said it was a verification of Shakespeare: —

> "Know you not *Pompey*?
> You have climbed up to the walls and battlements
> To see *Great Pompey* pass the streets of Rome."[31]

One fact should be chronicled. Their regimental banner, of superb white silk, had on one side the coat-of-arms of Massachusetts, and on the other a golden cross on a golden star, with IN HOC SIGNO VINCES beneath. *This is the first Christian banner that has gone into our war.* By a strange, and yet not strange, providence, God has made this despised race the bearers of his standard. They are thus the real leaders of the nation.

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29. The reference is to "John Brown's Body," a song so popular that it became a battle song and anthem across the North in 1860–61. After hearing it sung during a military parade in Washington, D.C., Julia Ward Howe matched its tune to her own verses, which she published in the February 1862 *Atlantic Monthly* as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

30. Brown is referring to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the best-known work by the Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith (1730–74).

31. A close paraphrase rather than exact quotation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, 1.1.37–42.

On reaching the wharf at a quarter before one, every thing had been placed on board through the efforts of Capt. McKim; the guns were placed in boxes, the horses put aboard, and the men began to embark. At four o'clock, the vessel steamed down the harbor, bound for Port Royal, S.C.[32]

THE COMPLETE ROSTER OF THE REGIMENT

Colonel. — Robert G. Shaw.

Lieut.-Colonel. — Norwood P. Hallowell.

Major. — Edward N. Hallowell.

Surgeon. — Lincoln R. Stone.

Assistant Surgeon. — C. B. Brigham.

Captains. — Alfred S. Hartwell, David A. Partridge, Samuel Willard, John W. M. Appleton, Watson W. Bridge, George Pope, William H. Simpkins, Cabot J. Russell, Edward L. Jones, and Louis F. Emilo [*sic*].[33]

1st. Lieutenants. — John Ritchie, Garth W. James, William H. Hemans, Orin E. Smith, Erik Wulff, Walter H. Wild, Francis L. Higginson, James M. Walton, James M. Grace, R. K. L. Jewett.

2d Lieutenants. — Thomas L. Appleton, Benjamin F. Dexter, J. Albert Pratt, Charles F. Smith, Henry W. Littlefield, William Nutt, David Reid, Charles E. Tucker, and William Howard.

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32. Port Royal, located on the coast near Hilton Head, served as a headquarters for the Union army.

33. Captain Luis F. Emilio's continuing homage to the regiment culminated in his pioneering documentary account, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* (Boston: Boston Book, 1891).

Many of the men in the Fifty-Fourth had once been slaves at the South; some had enjoyed freedom for years; others had escaped after the breaking out of the Rebellion. Most of them had relatives still there, and had a double object in joining the regiment. They were willing to risk their lives for the freedom of those left behind; and, if they failed in that, they might, at least, have an opportunity of settling with the "ole boss" for a long score of cruelty.

"From many a Southern field they trembling came,
Fled from the lash, the fetter, and the chain;
Return they now, not at base Slavery's claim,
To meet the oppressor on the battle-plain."

"The following song was written by a private in Company A, Fifty-Fourth (colored) Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, and has been sent to us for publication by a friend of the regiment."—*Boston Transcript.*

"Air.—'Hoist up the Flag.'

"Fremont told them, when the war it first begun,[34]
How to save the Union, and the way it should be done;
But Kentucky swore so hard, and old Abe he had his fears,
Till every hope was lost but the colored volunteers.

Chorus.—Oh! give us a flag all free without a slave,
We'll fight to defend it as our fathers did so brave:
The gallant Comp'ny A will make the rebels dance;
And we'll stand by the Union, if we only have a chance.

McClellan went to Richmond with two hundred thousand brave:

34. General John Frémont (1813–90), western explorer, soldier, and politician, was widely admired by African Americans for his outspoken opposition to slavery. He ran unsuccessfully for president in 1856 on an antislavery platform as the nominee of the newly formed Republican Party. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Frémont was appointed commanding general in the West, in which capacity he issued a proclamation ordering the freeing of the slaves of all people who took up arms against his army—a policy that Lincoln speedily countermanded.

He said, 'keep back the niggers,' and the Union he would save.[35]
Little Mac he had his way, still the Union is in tears:
Now they call for the help of the colored volunteers.
Chor.—Oh! give us a flag, &c.

Old Jeff says he'll hang us if we dare to meet him armed:[36]
A very big thing, but we are not at all alarmed;
For he first has got to catch us before the way is clear,
And 'that's what's the matter' with the colored volunteer.
Chor.—Oh! give us a flag, &c.

So rally, boys, rally, let us never mind the past:
We had a hard road to travel, but our day is coming fast;
For God is for the right, and we have no need to fear:
The Union must be saved by the colored volunteer.
Chor.—Oh! give us a flag, &c."

Chapter 32

Injustice to Colored Troops

The right of African Americans to serve in the Union army having been won, Brown proceeded to advocate their equitable treatment on and off the field of battle. In this chapter in which his outrage dominates his characteristic irony, he examines the bitter dispute that emerged about their fair compensation, a matter of considerable sensitivity to a former slave whose labor had once been gallingly outside his own control.

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35. General George McClellan (1826–85) was appointed by Lincoln to command the Army of the Potomac following the decisive loss at the first Battle of Bull Run. McClellan rose to replace Winfield Scott as commander-in-chief of the Union army in November 1861 but eventually fell out of favor with Lincoln and was himself replaced less than a year later. McClellan became publicly disenchanted with Lincoln and his policies and ran unsuccessfully against him in the 1864 presidential election as the Democratic candidate.

36. "Old Jeff" was the pejorative diminutive widely in use among Northerners and slaves for Jefferson Davis (1808–89), president of the Confederate States of America.

The specific issue was differential pay for black and white soldiers. In an anticipation of the postbellum demands by black industrial workers of equal pay for equal work, black soldiers demanded the same $13 salary per month and $3.50 clothing allowance that white enlistees received in the Union army. For most of the war, however, the black soldiers received only $7—pay fit for laborers, not combat soldiers. One outspoken member of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, Corporal James Henry Gooding, addressed his displeasure to the highest source by writing President Lincoln on September 28, 1863: "Now your Excellency, we have done a Soldier's Duty. Why Can't we have a Soldier's pay?"[37] The dispute, however, was not finally resolved until Congress legislated equal pay and also equal medical care, arms, and rations in the Army Appropriation Act of June 15, 1864, whose provisions were to be applied retroactively to January 1, 1863. The new policy meant back pay for eighteen months of uncompensated service for the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, which for a prolonged period had refused any payment whatsoever until the issue of discriminatory payment was resolved.[38]

When the War Department commenced recruiting colored men as soldiers in Massachusetts, New Orleans, and Hilton Head, it was done with the promise that these men should receive the same pay, clothing, and treatment that white soldiers did.[39] The same was promised at Camp William Penn, at Philadelphia.[40] After several regiments had been

37. Gooding wrote numerous letters during the conflict. The full text of the letter to Lincoln is printed in the modern edition of his correspondence, *On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Soldier's Civil War Letters from the Front*, ed. Virginia Matzke Adams (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 118–20. Brown met Gooding on February 18, 1863, when Brown was invited to address a war meeting of African Americans held in New Bedford, Massachusetts (xxviii). Gooding was subsequently taken prisoner at Olustee and died at Andersonville Prison in July 1864. Brown noted Gooding's death in chapter 29 of *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, referring to him as "the accomplished Goodin."

38. For a detailed discussion of the controversy and its resolution, see Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 200–203.

39. Brown lists, in reverse historical order, three of the most important centers for recruitment of black soldiers.

40. Camp William Penn, located just north of Philadelphia, operated from July 1863 to August 1865 as a recruitment and training center for black regiments. In contrast to earlier such centers, it was operated by the federal rather than state government.

raised and put in the field, the War Department decided to pay them but ten dollars per month, without clothing.[41] The Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Volunteers, and the Fifty-fifth, were both in South Carolina when this decision was made; yet the Government held on to the men who had thus been obtained under false pretenses.[42] Dissatisfaction showed itself as soon as this was known among the colored troops. Still the blacks performed their duty, hoping that Congress would see that justice was done to them. The men refused to receive less than was their just due when the paymaster came round, as the following will show:—

Hilton Head, S.C., Feb. 6, 1864.

"Samuel Harrison, Chaplain of the Fifty-fourth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers (colored troops), asks pay at the usual rate of chaplains,—one hundred dollars per month and two rations, which, he being of African descent, I decline paying, under Act of Congress, July 17, 1862, which authorizes the employment of persons of African descent in the army.[43] The chaplain declines receiving any thing less of

"Ten Eyke,
Paymaster, United-States Army."

It was left, however, for Massachusetts to take the lead, both by her governor, and by her colored soldiers in the field, to urge upon the Congress and the Administration the black man's claims. To the honor of

41. Black soldiers actually had $3 deducted as a clothing allowance from their $10 monthly salary, a deduction that was eliminated only in September 1864.

42. The Fifty-Fifth Massachusetts was a black regiment formed shortly after the better-known Fifty-Fourth. It also saw considerable action, mostly in South Carolina, and was one of the first Union regiments to enter the evacuated city of Charleston, on February 21, 1865.

43. Samuel Harrison, born a free black in Philadelphia, is listed by Emilio as having resigned his chaplaincy on March 14, 1864, because he was sick and had received no pay at the time "because of his color" (Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment*, 149–50).

Congress authorized the President on July 17, 1862, "to employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary and proper for the suppression of the rebellion." Lincoln ignored this legislation until early 1863.

John A. Andrew, the patriotic Chief Magistrate of the Bay State during the Rebellion, justice was demanded again and again. The following will show his feelings upon the subject:—

His Excellency Gov. Andrew, in a letter dated Executive Department, Boston, Aug. 24, and addressed to Mr. Frederick Johnson,[44] an officer in the regiment, says,—

"I have this day received your letter of the l0th of August, and in reply desire, in the first place, to express to you the lively interest with which I have watched every step of the Fifty-fourth Regiment since it left Massachusetts, and the feelings of pride and admiration with which I have learned and read the accounts of the heroic conduct of the regiment in the attack upon Fort Wagner, when you and your brave soldiers so well proved their manhood, and showed themselves to be true soldiers of Massachusetts. As to the matter inquired about in your letter, you may rest assured that I shall not rest until you shall have secured all of your rights, and that I have no doubt whatever of ultimate success. I have no doubt, by law, you are entitled to the same pay as other soldiers; and, on the authority of the Secretary of War, I promised that you should be paid and treated in all respects like other soldiers of Massachusetts. Till this is done, I feel that my promise is dishonored by the Government. The whole difficulty arises from a misapprehension, the correction of which will no doubt be made as soon as I can get the subject fully examined by the Secretary of War.

"I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

"JOHN A. ANDREW,
"*Governor of Massachusetts.*"

The subjoined letter, from a soldier of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Volunteers, needs no explanation:—

44. Emilio lists a Frederick Johnson, hairdresser from Boston, as a sergeant in Company C and as having served in the Fifty-Fourth until the end of the war (*History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment*, 351).

"We are still anticipating the arrival of the day when the Government will do justice to the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Regiments, and pay us what is justly our due.

"We have fought like men; we have worked like men; we have been ready at every call of duty, and thus have proved ourselves to be men: but still we are refused the thirteen dollars per month.

"Oh! what a shame it is to be treated thus! Some of us have wives and little children, who are looking for succor and support from their husbands and fathers; but, alas! they look in vain. The answer to the question, 'When shall we be able to assist them?' is left wholly to the Congress of the United States.

"What will the families of those poor comrades of ours who fell at James's Island, Fort Wagner, and Olustee, do?[45] They must suffer; for their husbands and fathers have gone the way of all the earth. They have gone to join that number that John saw, and to the right hand of God.

"Our hearts pine in bitter anguish when we look back to our loved ones at home, and we are compelled to shed many a briny tear. We have offered our lives a sacrifice for a country that has not the magnanimity to treat us as men. All that we ask is the rights of other soldiers, the liberty of other free men. If we cannot have these, give us an honorable discharge from the United-States service, and we will not ask for pay.

"We came here to fight for liberty and country, and not for money (we would scorn to do that); but they promised us, if we would enlist, they would give us thirteen dollars per month.

"It was all false. They only wanted to get the halter over our heads, and then say, 'Get out if you can.'

"Sir, the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Regiments would sooner consent to fight for the whole three years, gratis, than to be put upon the footing of contrabands.

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45. African American troops were involved in hard fighting at each of these three battles: James Island and Fort Wagner, both near Charleston, South Carolina; and Olustee, Florida.

"It is not that we think ourselves any better than they; for we are not. We know that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth'; but we have enlisted as Massachusetts Volunteers, and we will not surrender that proud position, come what may."[46]

Sergt. William Walker, of Company A, Third South-Carolina colored troops, feeling that he and his associates were unjustly dealt with, persuaded his company to go to their captain's tent, and stack their muskets, and refuse duty till paid. They did so, and the following was the result:—

Condemned and Shot for Mutiny[47]

"Sergt. William Walker, of Company A, Third South-Carolina colored troops, was yesterday killed, in accordance with the sentence of a court-martial. He had declared he would no longer remain a soldier for seven dollars per month, and had brought his company to stack their arms before their captain's tent, refusing to do duty until they should be paid thirteen dollars a month, as had been agreed when they were enlisted by Col. Saxon. He was a smart soldier and an able man, dangerous as leader in a revolt. His last moments were attended by Chaplain Wilson, Twenty-fourth Massachusetts, and Chaplain Moore, of the Second South-Carolina colored troops. The execution took place at Jacksonville, Fla., in presence of the regiments there in garrison. He met his death unflinchingly. Out of eleven shots first fired, but one struck him. A reserve firing-party had been provided, and by these he was shot to death.

"The mutiny for which this man suffered death arose entirely out of the inconsistent and contradictory orders of the Paymaster and

46. The quotation is from Acts 17:26.

47. The case of Sergeant William Walker was (and remains) well known. As Brown details in this vignette, Walker was summarily charged, convicted, and executed for his act of principled insubordination. Swift military justice was commonplace during wartime, but Walker's case had racial overtones.

the Treasury Department at Washington." — *Beaufort (S.C.) Cor. Tribune.*[48]

The United-States Paymaster visited the Department three times, and offered to pay laborers' wages, of ten dollars per month, to the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth, which to a man they refused, saying, "'Tis an insult, after promising us a soldier's pay, and calling upon us to do a soldier's duty (and faithfully has it been performed), to offer us the wages of a laborer, who is not called upon to peril his life for his country." Finding that the Government had tried to force them to take this reduced pay, Massachusetts sent down agents to make up the difference to them out of the State Treasury, trusting, that, ere long, the country would acknowledge them as on an equality with the rest of the army. But, in a manner that must redound to their credit, they refused it. Said they, "'Tis the principle, not the money, that we contend for: we will either be paid as soldiers, or fight without reward." This drew down upon them the hatred of the other colored troops (for those regiments raised in the South were promised but ten dollars, as the Government also took care of their families), and they had to bear much from them; but they did not falter. Standing by their expressed determination to have justice done them, they quietly performed their duties, only praying earnestly that every friend of theirs at the North would help the Government to see what a blot rests on its fair fame, — a betrayal of the trust reposed in them by the colored race.

When they rushed forward to save our army from being slaughtered at Olustee, it was the irrepressible negro humor, with something more than a dash of sarcasm, that prompted the battle-cry, "Three cheers for Old Massachusetts, and seven dollars a month!" (Three dollars were reserved by Government for clothes.)

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48. How and where this specific account of Walker's heroism and execution came to be published is not known, since no such newspaper is listed in the standard bibliography, *South Carolina Newspapers*, ed. John Hammond Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988). Journalistic activity by African Americans in Beaufort and the surrounding Sea Islands became commonplace after the war, when numerous newspapers came into existence under black ownership and editorial control.

Another soldier, a member of the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts, complains as follows:—

"Eleven months have now passed away and still we are without our pay. How our families are to live and pay house-rent I know not. Uncle Sam has long wind, and expects as much of us as any soldiers in the field; but, if we cannot get any pay, what have we to stimulate us?

"To work the way this regiment has for days, weeks, nay, months, and yet to get no money to send to our wives, children, and mothers, who are now suffering, would cause the hush of shame to mantle the cheek of a cannibal, were he our paymaster.

"But we will suffer all the days of our appointed time with patience, only let us know that we are doing some good, make manifest, too, that we are making men (and women) of our race; let us know that prejudice, the curse of the North as slavery is the curse of the South, is breaking, slowly but surely; then we will suffer more, work faster, fight harder, and stand firmer than before."

Chapter 44

Caste

This penultimate chapter offers one of the book's most strikingly aberrant, if entertaining, episodes. The relevance of its opening meditation on racial ideology in the aftermath of the Civil War is easily enough explained but not so the remainder of the chapter, which consists of a set of mostly autobiographical anecdotes centered on acts of racial discrimination. What, even the most attentive reader may ask, is this discursive skein of pre–Civil War personal anecdotes doing in a military history?

Brown presumably had his own antecedent question: How does one write military history about a people that, in the minds of most white Americans, had little reason to be the center of either history or history writing? Simply documenting participation in battle was for him an insufficient answer. Instead, he chose to tell personal stories, some about a variety of black Americans but others about himself. Drawing on his treasury of personal stories for his various books was typically a way of interjecting his own life history into that of his people. The result of that practice in *The Negro in the American Rebellion* was one more source of unconventionality, moving his text

uncomfortably between first and third person, past and present, and the modalities of oral and written culture even as most readers would have expected a Civil War history — whatever else it was — to be a written text centered on the field of battle.

Caste is usually found to exist in communities or countries among majorities, and against minorities. The basis of it is owing to some supposed inferiority or degradation attached to the hated ones. However, nothing is more foolish than this prejudice. But the silliest of all caste is that which is founded on *color*; for those who entertain it have not a single logical reason to offer in its defence.

The fact is, slavery has been the cause of all the prejudice against the negro. Wherever the blacks are ill treated on account of their color, it is because of their identity with a race that has long worn the chain of slavery. Is there any thing in black, that it should be hated? If so, why do we see so much black in common use as clothing among all classes? Indeed, black is preferred to either white or colors. How often the young man speaks in ecstasies of the black eyes and black hair of his lady-love! Look at the hundreds of advertised hair-dyes, used for the purpose of changing nature! See men with their gray beards dyed black; women with those beautiful black locks, which, but yesterday, were as white as the driven snow! Not only this, but even those with light or red whiskers run to the dye-kettle, steal a color which nature has refused them, and, an hour after, curse the negro for a complexion that is not stolen. If black is so hateful, why do not gentlemen have their boots whitewashed? If the slaves of the South had been white, the same prejudice would have existed against them. Look at the "poor white trash," as the lower class of whites in the Southern States are termed.[49]

Henry Clay would much rather have spent an evening with his servant

49. This rich disquisition on the cultural meanings of the colors black and white echoes memorable imaginings in two major American texts of the 1850s: Herman Melville's famous meditation, "The Whiteness of the Whale," in chapter 42 of *Moby-Dick* (1852), and the scene (chapter 13) in Hannah Crafts's *The Bondwoman's Narrative* in which a cosmetic blanching powder has the ironic effect of turning black the white face of a slaveholding woman.

Charles than to have made a companion of one of his poor white neighbors.[50] It is the condition, not the color, that is so hateful.

"When the Britons first became known to the Tyrian mariners," says Macaulay, "they were little superior to the Sandwich Islanders."[51] Caesar, writing home from Britain, said, "They are the most ignorant people I ever conquered." Many of the Britons, after their conquest by the Romans, were sent as slaves to Rome. Cicero, writing to his friend Atticus, advised him not to buy slaves from England; "because," said he, "they cannot be taught to read, and are the ugliest and most stupid race I ever saw."[52] These writers created a prejudice against the Britons, which caused them to be sold very cheap in Rome, where they were seen for years with brass collars on, containing their owner's name. The prejudice against the American negro is not worse today than that which existed

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50. Brown felt a particular animosity toward his fellow Kentuckian, one of the most influential politicians of his era. Clay (1771–1852), who served in a variety of senior governmental positions, including U.S. representative, senator, and secretary of state, held reputedly moderate views on race and slavery. These included reverence for racial purity and support for African colonization, positions that Brown found repulsive.

51. Tyre, a seaport located on the Mediterranean coast of what today is Lebanon, was the hub of the ancient Phoenician maritime empire. The Sandwich Islands, so named by their eighteenth-century discoverer, Captain James Cook, are universally known today as the Hawaiian Islands.

The (slightly misstated) quotation comes from chapter 1, volume 1, of *The History of England* by Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800–59), prolific man of letters, politician, and one of Victorian England's best-regarded historians. His immensely successful, five-volume *History of England* (1849–61) was reprinted across the English-speaking world.

52. Brown had previously cited these three writers to make the identical argument in his introductory essay to *The Black Man* (see chapter 6).

Julius Caesar (ca. 100 BCE–44 BCE) and his Roman legions expeditiously defeated the local forces of the Britons in 54 BCE but departed without following up on their advantage. His contempt for the Britons is clear in the account he gives of his campaign in *The Gallic War*.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) was an influential Roman politician and author. He interested Brown chiefly, however, for the low view of Britons that Brown represents him as holding in common with Caesar, his contemporary.

Titus Pomponius Atticus (ca. 110–ca. 35 BCE), a Roman man of business and patron of letters, is best known today for his friendship and correspondence with Cicero.

against the Britons. But, as soon as the condition of the poor, ill-treated, and enslaved Britons was changed, the caste disappears.

Twenty-five years ago, a slave escaped from Tennessee, and came to Buffalo, N.Y. He was as fair as the majority of whites, and, having been a house-servant, his manners and language were not bad. His name was Green. It was said that he had helped himself to some of his master's funds before leaving. For more than a month he had boarded at the American, the finest hotel in the city, where he sat at table with the boarders, and occupied the parlors in common with the rest of the inmates.

Mr. Green passed for a Southern gentleman, sported a gold watch, smoked his Havanas, and rode out occasionally. He was soon a favorite, especially with the daughters of Col. D—. Unfortunately for Mr. Green, one day, as he was taking his seat at the dinner-table, he found himself in front of one of his master's neighbors, who recognized him. The Southerner sent for the landlord, with whom he had a few moments' conversation, after which mine host approached the boarder, and said, "We don't allow niggers at the table here: get up. You must wait till the servants eat." Mr. Green was driven from the table, not on account of his color, but his condition. Under the old reign of slavery, it not unfrequently occurred that the master's acknowledged sons or daughters were of a much darker complexion than some of the slave children.

On one occasion, after my old master had returned home from the Legislature (of which he was a member), he had many new visitors.[53] One of these, a Major Moore, called in my master's absence. The major had never been to our place before, and therefore we were all strangers to him. The servant showed the visitor into the parlor, and the mistress soon after came in, and to whom the major introduced himself. I was at that time about ten years old, and was as white as most white boys. Whenever visitors came to the house, it was my part of the programme to dress myself in a neat suit, kept for such times, and go into the room, and stand behind the lady's chair. As I entered the room on this occasion, I had to

53. The story that follows was manifestly a personal favorite of Brown's. For an earlier telling, though there presented as fictitious, see chapter 5.

pass near by the major to reach the mistress. As I passed him, mistaking me for the son, he put out his hand, and said, "How do you do, bub?" And, before any answer could be given, he continued, "Madam, I would have known your son if I had met him in Mexico; for he looks so much like his papa." The lady's face reddened up, and she replied, "That's one of the niggers, sir"; and told me to go to the kitchen.

On my master's return home, I heard him and the major talking the matter over in the absence of the mistress. "I came near playing the devil here to-day, colonel," said the major.—"In what way?" inquired the former. "It is always my custom," said the latter, "to make fond of the children where I visit; for it pleases the mammas. So, to-day, one of your little niggers came into the room, and I spoke to him, reminding the madam how much he resembled you." "Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed the colonel, and continued, "you did not miss it much by calling him my son. Ha, ha, ha!"

An incident of a rather amusing character took place on Cayuga Lake some years ago.[54] I had but recently returned from England, where I had never been unpleasantly reminded of my color, when I was called to visit the pretty little city of Ithaca. On my return, I came down the lake in the steamer which leaves early in the morning. When the bell rang for breakfast, I went to the table, where I found some twenty or thirty persons. I had scarcely taken my seat, when a rather snobby-appearing man, of dark complexion, looking as if a South-Carolina or Georgia sun had tanned him, began rubbing his hands, and, turning up his nose, called the steward, and said to him, "Is it the custom on this boat to put niggers at the table with white people?" The servant stood for a moment, as if uncertain what reply to make, when the passenger continued, "Go tell the captain that I want him." Away went the steward. I had been too often insulted on account of my connection with the slave, not to know for what the captain was wanted. However, as I was hungry, I commenced helping myself to what I saw before me, yet keeping an eye to

54. Cayuga, with the town of Ithaca located on its southern shore, is the longest of the Finger Lakes of central New York State.

the door, through which the captain was soon to make his appearance. As the steward returned, and I heard the heavy boots of the commander on the stairs, a happy thought struck me; and I eagerly watched for the coming-in of the officer.

A moment more, and a strong voice called out, "Who wants me?"

I answered at once, "I, sir."

"What do you wish?" asked the captain.

"I want you to take this man from the table," said I.

At this unexpected turn of the affair, the whole cabin broke out into roars of laughter; while my rival on the opposite side of the table seemed bursting with rage. The captain, who had joined in the merriment, said,—

"Why do you want him taken from the table?"

"Is it your custom, captain," said I, "to let niggers sit at table with white folks on your boat?"

This question, together with the fact that the other passenger had sent for the officer, and that I had "stolen his thunder," appeared to please the company very much, who gave themselves up to laughter; while the Southern-looking man left the cabin with the exclamation, "*Damn fools!*"

Nothing is more ridiculous than the legal decision in the States of Ohio and Michigan, that a man containing not more than one-sixteenth of African blood in his veins shall be considered a white man, and, upon the above basis, shall enjoy the elective franchise.

We know of a family in Cincinnati, with three brothers, the youngest of whom is very fair, and who, under the above rule, is a voter; while the other two brothers are too dark to exercise the suffrage. Now, it so happens that the voting brother is ignorant and shiftless, while the others are splendid scholars. Where there is a great difference in the complexion of the husband and wife, there is generally a much greater difference in the color of the children; and this picking out the sons, on account of their fair complexion, seems cruel in the extreme, as it creates a jealous feeling in the family. While visiting my friend William Still, Esq., in Philadelphia, some time since, I was much amused at seeing his little daughter, a child

of eight or nine years, and her cousin, entering the omnibus which passed the door, going towards their school.[55] Colored persons were not allowed to ride in those conveyances; and one of the girls, being very fair, would pay the fare for both; while the dark-complexioned one would keep her face veiled. Thus the two children daily passed unmolested from their homes to the school, and returned. I was informed that once while I was there the veil unfortunately was lifted, the dark face seen, and the child turned out of the coach. How foolish that one's ride on a stormy day should depend entirely on a black veil!

"Colorphobia, which has hitherto been directed against 'American citizens of African descent,' has broken out in a new direction. Mong Chan Loo is a Burman who recently graduated at Lewisburg University, Penn., and has since been studying medicine, preparatory to returning to Asia as a missionary.[56] He is quite dark, but has straight hair, and is a gentleman of much cultivation. The other day, he took passage on the Muskingum-river packet, 'J. H. Bert,' and, when the supper-bell rang, was about to seat himself at the table.[57] The captain prevented him, informing him that, by the rules of the boat, colored persons must eat separately from the whites. He grew indignant at this, refused to eat on the boat at all, and, on arriving at Marietta, sued the owners of the boat for five thousand dollars damages for 'mental and bodily anguish suffered.' The case is a novel one; and its decision will perhaps involve the question, whether Africans alone, or Asiatics, and, perhaps, all dark-complexioned people, are included in the designation 'colored.' If the more sweeping definition prevails, brunettes will have to be provided with legally-attested pedigrees to secure for themselves seats at the first table and other Caucasian privileges."—*Cincinnati Gazette.*

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55. William Still (1821–1902) and his wife, Letitia, were dear friends of Brown's and central figures on the Philadelphia station of the Underground Railroad.

56. When Bucknell University was founded in 1846, it was named after the town of Lewisburg. Its name was changed in 1886 to honor its primary benefactor, William Bucknell, who sustained it through financial exigencies.

57. The Muskingum River flows south through eastern Ohio before emptying into the Ohio River at Marietta.

"The Dunkards, a peculiar religious society, numerous in some of the Western States, at their recent annual meeting discussed the question, 'Shall we receive colored persons into the church? and shall we salute them with the holy kiss?'[58] It was decided that they should be received into the church, but that all the members were to be left to their own choice and taste in regard to saluting their colored brethren, with the understanding, however, that all who refused to do so were to be regarded as weak."

In the year 1844, I visited a town in the State of Ohio, where a radical abolitionist informed me that he owned a pew in the village church, but had not attended worship there for years, owing to the proslavery character of the preacher.

"Why don't you sell your pew?" I inquired.

"I offered to sell it, last week, to a man, for ten dollars' worth of manure for my garden," said he; "but the farmer, who happens to be one of the pillars of the church, wants it for five dollars."

"What did it cost?" I inquired.

"Fifty dollars," was the reply.

"Are they very proslavery, the congregation?" I asked.

"Yes: they hate a black man worse than *pizen*," said he.

"Have you any colored family in your neighborhood?" I inquired.

"We have," said he, "a family about four miles from here."

"Are they very black?" I asked.

"Yes: as black as tar," said he.

"Now," said I, "my friend, I can put you in the way of selling your pew, and for its worth, or near what it cost you."

"If you can, I'll give you half [*sic*] I get," he replied.

"Get that colored family, every one of them, take them to church, don't miss a single Sunday; and, my word for it, in less than four weeks, they, the church-folks, will make you an offer," said I.

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58. The Dunkards are a German Pietist sect that settled first in colonial Pennsylvania and later branched out through the Ohio River valley westward and up to Canada. A central ritual of their observance is the love feast, which includes a "holy kiss" signifying communal solidarity.

An arrangement was made with Mr. Spencer, the black man, by which himself, wife, and two sons, were to attend church four successive Sabbaths; for which, they were to receive in payment a hog. The following Sunday, Mason's pew was the centre of attraction. From the moment that the Spencer Family arrived at the church, till the close of the afternoon service, the eyes of the entire congregation were turned towards "the niggers." Early on Monday, Mr. Mason was called upon by the "pillar," who said, "I've concluded to give you ten dollars' worth of manure for your pew, Mr. Mason."

"I can't sell it for that," was the reply. "I ask fifty dollars for my pew; and I guess Mr. Spencer will take it, if he likes the preaching," continued the abolitionist.

"What!" said the "pillar," "does that nigger want the pew?"

"He'll take it if the preaching suits him," returned Mason.

The churchman left with a flea in his ear. The second Sunday, the blacks were all on hand to hear the lining of the first hymn. The news of the pew being occupied by the negroes on the previous occasion had spread far and wide, and an increase of audience was the result. The clergyman preached a real negro-hating sermon, apparently prepared for the express purpose of driving the blacks away. However, this failed; for the obnoxious persons were present in the afternoon. Mr. Mason was called upon on Monday by another weighty member, who inquired if the pew was for sale, and its price.

"Fifty dollars," was the reply.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars," said the member.

"Fifty dollars, and nothing less," was Mason's answer.

The weighty member left, without purchasing the pew. Being on a lecturing tour in the vicinity, I ran into town, occasionally, to see how the matter progressed; for I had an eye to one-half of the proceeds of the sale of the pew.

During the week, Spencer came, complained of the preaching, saying that his wife could not and would not stand it, and would refuse to attend again; whereupon, I went over, through a dreary rain, and promised the wife a shilling calico-dress if she would fulfil the agreement. This over-

came her objections. I also arranged that two colored children of another family, near by, should be borrowed for the coming Sunday. Mason was asked how the Spencers liked the preaching. He replied that the blacks were well pleased, and especially with the last sermon, alluding to the negro-hating discourse.

The following Sunday found Mason's pew filled to overflowing; for the two additional ones had left no space unoccupied. That Sunday did the work completely; for the two borrowed boys added interest to the scene by taking different courses. One was tumbling about over the laps of the older persons in the pew, attracting rather more attention than was due him, and occasionally asking for "bed and butter"; while the smaller one slept, and snored loud enough to be heard several pews away. On Monday morning following, Mr. Mason was called upon. The pew was sold for fifty dollars cash. I received my portion of the funds, and gave Spencer's wife the calico gown. Mason called in the few hated radicals, and we had a general good time.

During the same lecturing tour, I was called to visit the village of Republic, some thirty miles from Sandusky.[59]

On taking a seat in one of the cars where other passengers had seated themselves, I was ordered out, with the remark, that "Niggers ain't allowed in here." Refusing to leave the car, two athletic men, employed by the road, came in at the bidding of the conductor, and, taking me by the collar, dragged me out.

"Where shall I ride?" I asked. "Where you please; but not in these cars," was the reply. Under ordinary circumstances, I would have declined going by the train. But I had an appointment, and must go. As the signal for starting was given, I reluctantly mounted a flour-barrel in the open freight-car attached to the train, and away we went through the woods.

From my position, I had a very good view of the passengers in the nearest car, and must confess that they did not appear to be the most

59. The story that follows is an only marginally changed version of the autobiographical story Brown interjects into chapter 19 of *Clotel*.

refined individuals. The majority looked like farmers. There were some drovers, one of whom, with his dog at his feet, sat at the end window: the animal occasionally got upon the seat by the side of its master, when the latter would take him by the ears, and pull him off. The drover seemed to say to me, as he eyed me sitting on the barrel in the hot sun, "You can't come where my dog is." At the first stopping-place, a dozen or more laboring-men, employed in repairing the road, got on the train with their pickaxes and shovels. They, too, took seats in a passenger-car. I had a copy of Pope's poems, and was trying to read "The Essay on Man"; but almost failed, on account of the severity of the sun.[60] However, a gentleman in the car, seeing my condition, took pity on me, and, at the next stopping-place, kindly lent me his umbrella; which was no sooner hoisted than it drew the attention of the drover at one of the end windows, and some of the Irishmen at the other, who set up a jolly laugh at my expense. Up to this time, the conductor had not called on me for my ticket; but, as the train was nearing the place of my destination, he climbed upon the car, came to me, and, holding out his hand, said, "I'll take your ticket, sir." — "I have none," said I. "Then, I'll take your fare," continued he, still holding out his hand. "How much is it?" I inquired. "A dollar and a quarter," he replied. "How much do you charge those in the passenger-car?" — "The same," was the response. "Do you think that I will pay as much as those having comfortable seats? No, sir. I shall do no such thing," said I. "Then," said the conductor, "you must get off," — "Stop your train, and I'll get off," I replied. "Do you think I'll stop these cars for you?" "Well," said I, "you can do as you please. I will not pay full fare, and ride on a flour-barrel in the hot sun." — "Since you make so much fuss about it, give me a dollar, and you may go," said the conductor. "I'll do no such thing," I replied. "Why? Don't you wish to pay your fare?" asked he. "Yes," I replied. "I will pay what's right; but I'll not pay you a dollar for riding on a flour-barrel in the hot sun." — "Then,

60. *The Essay on Man* (1732–34), by the English poet Alexander Pope, is one of the greatest philosophical poems of the Enlightenment. This witty detail was not in the version of the story Brown told in *Clotel*.

since you feel so terribly bad about it, give me seventy-five cents, and I'll say no more about it," said the officer. "No, sir: I shall not do it," said I. "What do you mean to pay?" asked he. "How much do you charge per hundred for freight?" I asked. "Twenty-five cents per hundred," answered the conductor. "Then I'll pay thirty-seven and a-half cents," said I; "for I weigh one hundred and fifty pounds." The astonished man eyed me from head to feet; while the drover and the Irish laborers, who were piled up at each window of the passenger-car, appeared not a little amused at what they supposed to be a muss between the conductor and me. Finally, the officer took a blank account out of his pocket, and said, "Give me thirty-seven and a-half cents, and I'll set you down as freight." I paid over the money, and saw myself duly put among the other goods in the freight-car.

A New-York journal is responsible for the following:—

"It is not many months since a colored man came to this city from abroad. A New-York merchant had been in business connection with him for several years; and from that business connection had realized a fortune, and felt that he must treat him kindly. When Sunday came, he invited him to go to church with him. He went; and the merchant took him into his own pew, near the pulpit, in a fashionable church. There was a prominent member of the church near the merchant, who saw this with great amazement. He could not be mistaken: it was a genuine "nigger," and not a counterfeit. Midway in his sermon, the minister discovered him, and was so confused by it, that he lost his place, and almost broke down.

After service, the man who sat near the merchant went to him, and in great indignation asked,—

"What does this mean?"

"What does what mean?"

"That you should bring a nigger into this church?"

"It is my pew."

"Your pew, is it? And, because it is your pew, you must insult the whole congregation!"

"He is intelligent and well educated," answered the merchant.

"What do I care for that? He is a nigger!"

"But he is a friend of mine."

"What of that? Must you therefore insult the whole congregation?"

"But he is a Christian, and belongs to the same denomination"

"What do I care for that? Let him worship with his nigger Christians."

"But he is worth five million dollars," said the merchant.

"Worth what?"

"Worth five million dollars."

"For God's sake introduce me to him," was the reply.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Writing African American Memoir

In 1880 Brown published *My Southern Home*, a Janus-faced memoir that looked back to the antebellum plantation society and forward to the emergent postbellum, postplantation South. The book most nearly of his old age, *My Southern Home* may more appropriately be labeled his "last" rather than his "final" work, as finality is not a quality applicable to a writer whose relentless pursuit of a revisionist sense of self resulted in no ultimate literary form, content, or text. That personal characteristic corresponded to his working understanding of African American social reality as a phenomenon undergoing constant regeneration. What he saw, more specifically, as he researched and wrote *My Southern Home* was what he called simply "the reaction," the reversal of the hard-earned political, social, and economic progress during the Civil War and Reconstruction that came from the adoption of de facto and de jure segregation. He watched in disgust as racial progress gave way to institutionalized racism on a state-by-state basis across the South, while the rest of the country signaled its acquiescence.

Painful for the entire African American population, this regression to Jim Crow was particularly disheartening to activists of Brown's generation who had dedicated their entire adult lives to reform. An aging man by the time of the removal of federal troops from the South in 1877, an act that effectively ended the nation's experiment in Reconstruction, Brown was less physically active on a daily basis in reform activities, although he continued to read widely and keep himself broadly informed. His last autobiography takes the measure of that historical transformation, if this time registered from a position of greater removal in time and place.

Figure 5. The Great House at Poplar Farm, the Missouri plantation where Brown lived during his early teens. Perkins Library, Duke University.

In the past Brown's works had been heavily populated by heroes. Numbering in the dozens, a roll call of great African Americans had passed through the pages of his books: Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, the soldiers of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, or runaway slaves (whether named Brown or a dozen other names). Central to the earlier works' ideology of heroism was a view of history as a progressive dynamic in which great men and women, exercising indomitable powers of mind and spirit, moved society ever closer to the American ideals of liberty and equality. In 1880, however, Brown was having none of the logic of heroism. "No attempt has been made to create

heroes or heroines, or to appeal to the imagination or the heart," he wrote in the first sentence of the book's preface, and what he stipulated there underlay his conceptualization of the entire book.

If heroism was no longer a credible posture, what was? For many Americans of his time it increasingly was nostalgia, a romanticizing attitude that envisioned a better past and, with what Brown and other veterans of the antislavery movement would have considered a particularly perverse logic, located it more frequently in the Old South than in any other region. Brown's curious choice of title may raise a quick suspicion that he too was engaging in an affectionate or wistful look backward at better times. For that matter, the same observation can be applied to numerous of his peers, who in the years after the war increasingly drifted back physically and/or mentally to their former southern homes. Few of these men and women, however, could do so without tangled emotions. Frederick Douglass, for example, announced proudly during the first of his three visits (1877, 1878, and 1881) to his native Maryland: "I am an Eastern Shoreman. . . . Eastern Shore corn and Eastern Shore pork gave me my muscles."[1] Douglass also paid an emotional visit to his dying former master Thomas Auld. But each trip cost Douglass dearly, involving him in delicate public relations as well as self-negotiations. Harriet Jacobs actually returned to the South for an extended residence during and after the Civil War to do various kinds of humanitarian work with the freedmen. She also paid several visits — not happy — to her native Edenton, North Carolina, to visit relatives and renew old ties. But her chosen home was in the North; during the 1870s she lived, as did Brown and his wife, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Like Douglass, Jacobs, and thousands of other members of their generation, Brown left behind in the South immediate family members, powerful memories, and lasting associations. Brown was so plagued by anger, guilt, and frustration at his separation from immediate family that for years he persisted in invoking their presence in his writings and public addresses across

1. Quoted in William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 293.

the United States and Great Britain.[2] Altogether he made four postbellum trips to the South. On one occasion he returned not just to the South but, like Douglass and Jacobs, to the place of his bondage. This visit took place during an extensive lecture trip in winter 1869 when he stopped in St. Louis and not only visited places associated with his early experience but also met his former master Enoch Price. Brown also passed through Cincinnati several times during his travels, never failing to associate it with his own flight to freedom.

His new book took cognizance of his and his people's divided geographical heritage. Before the Civil War more than 90 percent of the country's African American population lived in the South. In the years and decades following emancipation, a steady stream of freedmen and their descendants flowed north in the hope of finding a better life, although not until the early twentieth century did the flow become the Great Migration. Brown was well aware of the incentives to black flight and took a pragmatic position on this postbellum development. In the next-to-last chapter of *My Southern Home*, he practically shouted his encouragement: "Some say, 'stay and fight it out, contend for your rights, don't let the old rebels drive you away, the country is as much yours as theirs.' That kind of talk will do very well for men who have comfortable homes out of the South, and law to protect them; but for the negro, with no home, no food, no work . . . such talk is nonsense. Fight out what? Hunger? Poverty? Cold? Starvation? Black men, emigrate."[3]

Such was the course of Brown's own life, which in time had landed him in relative comfort and security in the North. Never better established personally than in his last decade, he nevertheless expressed a pervasive collective insecurity in *My Southern Home*, a work that rests precariously between North and South, past and present. The book pulls

2. Whether he actively searched for his lost family members after the war is not known. Some former slaves and other Northern relatives did search; relatively few succeeded. One who did was his old friend Ellen Craft, who located her mother in Georgia and sent for her to live with the family in its new home in England (Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* [New York: Basic Books, 2004], 214).

3. *My Southern Home* (1880; reprint, Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Gregg, 1968), 248.

in opposite directions, as it attempts to make sense of the past from the point of view of the present, and to make sense of the present from the experience of the past. This back-and-forth tug is expressed through the book's organization into two parts, though not formally delineated as such. The first half looks back to the antebellum, slaveholding Missouri of his boyhood, both as he remembered it and as he had rendered it in his earlier writings (several of whose stories get retold and revised in *My Southern Home*). The shorter second half critiques the new South that emerged from the sequence of Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow. That portion resulted from Brown's continuing interest in the life of the South and most immediately from his winter 1879–80 tour through Tennessee, Alabama, and Virginia. Everywhere he went, he made inquiries among local inhabitants and officials, visited local families, read the local press, attended festivities and services, and surveyed living conditions. The result of those inquiries figured heavily in the book that he had apparently already undertaken and rapidly finished following his return to the Boston area.

Underlying *My Southern Home* was Brown's attempt to render a sufficient accounting of his and his people's complicated history. A difficult task under the best of circumstances, it was made all the more difficult by historically unprecedented times. Black leaders strained in the years after Reconstruction to fashion solutions to a deteriorating position, as old enemies reasserted their power and old friends fell away. The antislavery movement had spent itself—Brown in his last years participated in the memorials for his friends and comrades William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips—and left no clear successor. The strain on Brown's powers of synthesis shows; *My Southern Home* is a work as provisional as the times in which he lived.

By 1880 Brown was the most widely published African American author of the century. His arrangement for the publication of *My Southern Home* rounded the circle of his professional history, in effect bringing him home. For reasons not entirely clear he shirked the established trade to self-publish the work with the Boston "firm" of A. G. Brown and Company—A. G. Brown referred to his wife, Anna Gray; the Company,

in effect, to himself. Their marriage was from the start a progressive one, a partnership in which Anna was active both independently and jointly with her husband in antislavery and temperance reform. It may be that their shared activities included her participation in the merchandising of this book (as well as of Brown's previous one, *The Rising Son*, also published by A. G. Brown and Company). Advertisements in the back of *My Southern Home* also listed Brown's two previous books as available for sale by mail from their home address.

All those books, like most of Brown's earlier productions, far exceeded the nineteenth-century publishing norm in sales, number of printings, and duration of time in print. To the end of his life Brown remained a man of print and a writer in print. Not until after his death, and after the death of his and his contemporaries' dream of a society based on racial equality, did his books go out of print and his name fall into general oblivion. That situation changed only with the coming of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, with its consequences for our understanding of U.S. history and culture.

Brown did not use chapter titles; I have supplied the bracketed subtitles here for ease of reference.

SELECTIONS FROM

My Southern Home

Chapter 1

[Antebellum Impressions and Memories]

Brown's discussion of the antebellum past in this opening chapter, as throughout the first half of *My Southern Home*, is loosely autobiographical. He was taken as a small child in 1816 to rural Missouri by his master, a medical doctor and plantation owner named John Young. In 1827 Young acquired a large farm closer to St. Louis, the original of the book's Poplar Farm. Brown lived for most of the next seven years in St. Louis, with only relatively brief periods of service (mostly as a house servant) on the farm, before his escape in 1834. Some names, dates, and details in Brown's recollections are fictionalized.

In revisiting the world of his Missouri boyhood, Brown uses the liberating power of story to portray the complicated interactions of blacks and whites under the peculiar institution.[1] One underlying feature of his particular mode of retrospective storytelling is stated toward the end of *My Southern Home*: "Wit and religion has ever been the negro's forte while in slavery. Wit with which to please his master, or to soften his anger when displeased, and religion to enable him to endure punishment when inflicted." This chapter is full of battles of wit between the races, whether at home, during worship, or in the field.

Ten miles north of the city of St. Louis, in the State of Missouri, forty years ago, on a pleasant plain, sloping off toward a murmuring stream, stood a large frame-house, two stories high; in front was a beautiful lake, and, in the rear, an old orchard filled with apple, peach, pear, and plum

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The following selections come from the original edition: *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People* (Boston: A. G. Brown and Company, 1880).

1. Brown's act of recollecting his antebellum Missouri boyhood parallels that of Mark Twain, who revisited his in three books contemporaneous with *My Southern Home*: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

trees, with boughs untrimmed, all bearing indifferent fruit. The mansion was surrounded with piazzas, covered with grape-vines, clematis, and passion flowers; the Pride of China mixed its oriental-looking foliage with the majestic magnolia, and the air was redolent with the fragrance of buds peeping out of every nook, and nodding upon you with a most unexpected welcome.

The tasteful hand of art, which shows itself in the grounds of European and New-England villas, was not seen there, but the lavish beauty and harmonious disorder of nature was permitted to take its own course, and exhibited a want of taste so commonly witnessed in the sunny South.

The killing effects of the tobacco plant upon the lands of "Poplar Farm," was to be seen in the rank growth of the brier, the thistle, the burdock, and the jimpson weed, showing themselves wherever the strong arm of the bondman had not kept them down.

Dr. Gaines, the proprietor of "Poplar Farm," was a good-humored, sunny-sided old gentleman, who, always feeling happy himself, wanted everybody to enjoy the same blessing. Unfortunately for him, the Doctor had been born and brought up in Virginia, raised in a family claiming to be of the "F. F. V.'s," but, in reality, was comparatively poor.[2] Marrying Mrs. Sarah Scott Pepper, an accomplished widow lady of medium fortune, Dr. Gaines emigrated to Missouri, where he became a leading man in his locality.

Deeply imbued with religious feeling of the Calvinistic school, well-versed in the Scriptures, and having an abiding faith in the power of the Gospel to regenerate the world, the Doctor took great pleasure in presenting his views wherever his duties called him.[3]

As a physician, he did not rank very high, for it was currently reported, and generally believed, that the father, finding his son unfit for mercantile business, or the law, determined to make him either a clergyman or

2. FFVs was shorthand for "first families of Virginia."

3. The Calvinistic religion invoked throughout this chapter and subsequent ones was a fundamentalist faith whose practice emphasized a literalist reading of the Bible and whose theology conceived of human beings as innately corrupt and bound for eternal damnation without divine intervention.

a physician. Mr. Gaines, Senior, being somewhat superstitious, resolved not to settle the question too rashly in regard to the son's profession, therefore, it is said, flipped a cent, feeling that "heads or tails" would be a better omen than his own judgment in the matter. Fortunately for the cause of religion, the head turned up in favor of the medical profession. Nevertheless, the son often said that he believed God had destined him for the *sacred calling*, and devoted much of his time in exhorting his neighbors to seek repentance.

Most planters in our section cared but little about the religious training of their slaves, regarding them as they did their cattle,—an investment, the return of which was only to be considered in dollars and cents. Not so, however, with Dr. John Gaines, for he took special pride in looking after the spiritual welfare of his slaves, having them all in the "great house," at family worship, night and morning.[4]

On Sabbath mornings, reading of the Scriptures, and explaining the same, generally occupied from one to two hours, and often till half of the negroes present were fast asleep. The white members of the family did not take as kindly to the religious teaching of the doctor, as did the blacks.

For his Christian zeal, I had the greatest respect, for I always regarded him as a truly pious and conscientious man, willing at all times to give of his means the needful in spreading the Gospel.

Mrs. Sarah Gaines was a lady of considerable merit, well-educated, and of undoubted piety. If she did not join heartily in her husband's religious enthusiasm, it was not for want of deep and genuine Christian feeling, but from the idea that he was of more humble origin than herself, and, therefore, was not a capable instructor.

This difference in birth, this difference in antecedents does much in the South to disturb family relations wherever it exists, and Mrs. Gaines, when wishing to show her contempt for the Doctor's opinions, would

4. The "great house" (or "big house") was the residence of the master's family, to which only house servants, among slaves, normally had access.

allude to her own parentage and birth in comparison to her husband's. Thus, once, when they were having a "family jar," she, with tears streaming down her cheeks, and wringing her hands, said, —

"My mother told me that I was a fool to marry a man so much beneath me, — one so much my inferior in society. And now you show it by hectoring and aggravating me all you can. But, never mind; I thank the Lord that He has given me religion and grace to stand it. Never mind, one of these days the Lord will make up His jewels, — take me home to glory, out of your sight, — and then I'll be devilish glad of it!"

These scenes of unpleasantness, however, were not of everyday occurrence, and, therefore, the great house at the "Poplar Farm," may be considered as having a happy family.

Slave children, with almost an alabaster complexion, straight hair, and blue eyes, whose mothers were jet black, or brown, were often a great source of annoyance in the Southern household, and especially to the mistress of the mansion.

Billy, a quadroon of eight or nine years, was amongst the young slaves, in the Doctor's house, then being trained up for a servant. Any one taking a hasty glance at the lad would never suspect that a drop of negro blood coursed through his blue veins. A gentleman, whose acquaintance Dr. Gaines had made, but who knew nothing of the latter's family relations, called at the house in the Doctor's absence. Mrs. Gaines received the stranger, and asked him to be seated, and remain till the host's return. While thus waiting, the boy, Billy, had occasion to pass through the room. The stranger, presuming the lad to be a son of the Doctor, exclaimed, "How do you do?" and turning to the lady, said, "how much he looks like his father; I should have known it was the Doctor's son, if I had met him in Mexico!"

With flushed countenance and excited voice, Mrs. Gaines informed the gentleman that the little fellow was "only a slave and nothing more."[5]

5. This is the third telling of a favorite story. For earlier ones, see Brown's play *The Escape* (chapter 5) and *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (chapter 7).

After the stranger's departure, Billy was seen pulling up grass in the garden, with bare head, neck and shoulders, while the rays of the burning sun appeared to melt the child.

This process was repeated every few days for the purpose of giving the slave the color that nature had refused it. And yet, Mrs. Gaines was not considered a cruel woman,—indeed she was regarded as a kind-feeling mistress. Billy, however, a few days later, experienced a roasting far more severe than the one he had got in the sun.

The morning was cool, and the breakfast table was spread near the fireplace, where a newly-built fire was blazing up. Mrs. Gaines, being seated near enough to feel very sensibly the increasing flames, ordered Billy to stand before her.

The lad at once complied. His thin clothing giving him but little protection from the fire, the boy soon began to make up faces and to twist and move about, showing evident signs of suffering.

"What are you riggling about for?" asked the mistress. "It burns me," replied the lad; "turn round, then," said the mistress; and the slave commenced turning around, keeping it up till the lady arose from the table.

Billy, however, was not entirely without his crumbs of comfort. It was his duty to bring the hot biscuit from the kitchen to the great house table while the whites were at meal. The boy would often watch his opportunity, take a "cake" from the plate, and conceal it in his pocket till breakfast was over, and then enjoy his stolen gain. One morning Mrs. Gaines, observing that the boy kept moving about the room, after bringing in the "cakes," and also seeing the little fellow's pocket sticking out rather largely, and presuming that there was something hot there, said, "Come here." The lad came up; she pressed her hand against the hot pocket, which caused the boy to jump back. Again the mistress repeated, "Come here," and with the same result.

This, of course, set the whole room, servants and all, in a roar. Again and again the boy was ordered to "come up," which he did, each time jumping back, until the heat of the biscuit was exhausted, and then he was made to take it out and throw it into the yard, where the geese seized it and held a carnival over it. Billy was heartily laughed at by his

companions in the kitchen and the quarters, and the large blister, caused by the hot biscuit, created merriment among the slaves, rather than sympathy for the lad.

Mrs. Gaines, being absent from home one day, and the rest of the family out of the house, Billy commenced playing with the shot-gun, which stood in the corner of the room, and which the boy supposed was unloaded; upon a corner shelf, just above the gun, stood a band-box, in which was neatly laid away all of Mrs. Gaines' caps and cuffs, which, in those days, were in great use.

The gun having the flint lock, the boy amused himself with bringing down the hammer and striking fire. By this action powder was jarred into the pan, and the gun, which was heavily charged with shot, was discharged, the contents passing through the band-box of caps, cutting them literally to pieces and scattering them over the floor.

Billy gathered up the fragments, put them in the box and placed it upon the shelf,—he alone aware of the accident.

A few days later, and Mrs. Gaines was expecting company; she called to Hannah to get her a clean cap. The servant, in attempting to take down the box, exclaimed: "Lor, misses, ef de rats ain't bin at dees caps an' cut 'em all to pieces, jes look here." With a degree of amazement not easily described the mistress beheld the fragments as they were emptied out upon the floor.

Just then a new idea struck Hannah, and she said: "I lay anything dat gun has been shootin' off."

"Where is Billy? Where is Billy?" exclaimed the mistress; "Where is Billy?" echoed Hannah; fearing that the lady would go into convulsions, I hastened out to look for the boy, but he was nowhere to be found; I returned only to find her weeping and wringing her hands, exclaiming, "O, I am ruined, I am ruined; the company's coming and not a clean cap about the house; O, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

I tried to comfort her by suggesting that the servants might get one ready in time; Billy soon made his appearance, and looked on with wonderment; and, when asked how he came to shoot off the gun, declared that he knew nothing about it; and "ef de gun went off, it was of its own

accord." However, the boy admitted the snapping of the lock or trigger. A light whipping was all that he got, and for which he was well repaid by having an opportunity of telling how the "caps flew about the room when de gun went off."

Relating the event some time after in the quarters he said: "I golly, you had aughty seen dem caps fly, and de dust and smok' in de room. I thought de judgment day had come, sure nuff." On the arrival of the company, Mrs. Gaines made a very presentable appearance, although the caps and laces had been destroyed. One of the visitors on this occasion was a young Mr. Sarpee, of St. Louis, who, although above twenty-one years of age, had never seen anything of country life, and, therefore, was very anxious to remain over night, and go on a coon hunt. Dr. Gaines, being lame, could not accompany the gentleman, but sent Ike, Cato, and Sam; three of the most expert coon-hunters on the farm. Night came, and off went the young man and the boys on the coon hunt. The dogs scented game, after being about half an hour in the woods, to the great delight of Mr. Sarpee, who was armed with a double barrel pistol, which, he said, he carried both to "protect himself, and to shoot the coon."

The halting of the boys and the quick, sharp bark of the dogs announced that the game was "treed," and the gentleman from the city pressed forward with fond expectation of seeing the coon, and using his pistol. However, the boys soon raised the cry of "polecat, polecat; get out de way"; and at the same time, retreating as if they were afraid of an attack from the animal. Not so with Mr. Sarpee; he stood his ground, with pistol in hand, waiting to get a sight of the game. He was not long in suspense, for the white and black spotted creature soon made its appearance, at which the city gentleman opened fire upon the skunk, which attack was immediately answered by the animal, and in a manner that caused the young man to wish that he, too, had retreated with the boys. Such an odor, he had never before inhaled; and, what was worse, his face, head, hands and clothing was covered with the cause of the smell, and the gentleman, at once, said: "Come, let's go home; I've got enough of coon-hunting." But, didn't the boys enjoy the fun.

The return of the party home was the signal for a hearty laugh, and all at the expense of the city gentleman. So great and disagreeable was the smell, that the young man had to go to the barn, where his clothing was removed, and he submitted to the process of washing by the servants. Soap, scrubbing brushes, towels, indeed, everything was brought into requisition, but all to no purpose. The skunk smell was there, and was likely to remain. Both family and visitors were at the breakfast table, the next morning, except Mr. Sarpee. He was still in the barn, where he had slept the previous night. Nor did there seem to be any hope that he would be able to visit the house, for the smell was intolerable. The substitution of a suit of the Doctor's clothes for his own failed to remedy the odor.

Dinkie, the conjurer, was called in.[6] He looked the young man over, shook his head in a knowing manner, and said it was a big job. Mr. Sarpee took out a Mexican silver dollar, handed it to the old negro, and told him to do his best. Dinkie smiled, and he thought that he could remove the smell.

His remedy was to dig a pit in the ground large enough to hold the man, put him in it, and cover him over with fresh earth; consequently, Mr. Sarpee was, after removing his entire clothing, buried, all except his head, while his clothing was served in the same manner. A servant held an umbrella over the unhappy man, and fanned him during the eight hours that he was there.

Taken out of the pit at six o'clock in the evening, all joined with Dinkie in the belief that Mr. Sarpee "smelt sweeter," than when interred in the morning; still the smell of the "polecat" was there. Five hours longer in the pit, the following day, with a rub down by Dinkie, with his "Goopher," fitted the young man for a return home to the city.

I never heard that Mr. Sarpee ever again joined in a "coon hunt."

No description of mine, however, can give anything like a correct idea

6. Because ordinary methods of sanitation had failed, the white gentleman is willing to consult the local conjurer, a practitioner of African folkloric magic often referred to as hoodoo.

of the great merriment of the entire slave population on "Poplar Farm," caused by the "coon hunt." Even Uncle Ned, the old superannuated slave, who seldom went beyond the confines of his own cabin, hobbled out, on this occasion, to take a look at "de gentleman fum de city," while buried in the pit.

At night, in the quarters, the slaves had a merry time over the "coon hunt."

"I golly, but didn't de polecat give him a big dose?" said Ike.

"But how Mr. Sarpee did talk French to hissef when de ole coon peppered him," remarked Cato.

"He won't go coon huntin' agin, soon, I bet you," said Sam.

"De coon hunt," and "de gemmen fum de city," was the talk for many days.

Chapter 2
[Plantation Stories]

This wide-ranging chapter offers a mordantly comic series of sketches culminating in the conclusion: "Slavery has had the effect of brightening the mental powers of the negro to a certain extent, especially those brought into close contact with the whites." This battle with whites was often for slaves a mentally and spiritually invigorating necessity, a way to maintain pride and dignity with words when action was impossible. But it was also potentially a dangerous game, as when the unfairly "corrected" slave Jim prays publicly with unguarded sincerity for his master's spiritual correction through salvation.

Brown's portrayal of the racial battle of wits anticipates the vein of racial humor that, in the hands of a generation of younger Southern writers such as Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, and Charles Chesnutt (not to mention, in the columns of newspapers around the country), became a staple of American writing in the 1880s and 1890s. If for these younger writers the world of the plantation was a generation or more removed, for Brown it was a lived experience. Observing him reclaim that world imaginatively is therefore particularly interesting. The interest is heightened literally by the way he engages in that activity by recycling literary material that he had used back in the 1850s in *Clotel* and *The Escape*.

I have already said that Dr. Gaines was a man of deep religious feeling, and this interest was not confined to the whites, for he felt that it was the Christian duty to help to save all mankind, white and black. He would often say, "I regard our negroes as given to us by an All Wise Providence, for their especial benefit, and we should impart to them Christian civilization." And to this end, he labored most faithfully.

No matter how driving the work on the plantation, whether seed-time or harvest, whether threatened with rain or frost, nothing could prevent his having the slaves all in at family prayers, night and morning. Moreover, the older servants were often invited to take part in the exercises. They always led the singing, and, on Sabbath mornings, were permitted to ask questions eliciting Scriptural explanations. Of course, some of the questions and some of the prayers were rather crude, and the effect, to an educated person, was rather to call forth laughter than solemnity.

Leaving home one morning, for a visit to the city, the Doctor ordered Jim, an old servant, to do some mowing in the rye-field; on his return, finding the rye-field as he had left it in the morning, he called Jim up, and severely flogged him without giving the man an opportunity of telling why the work had been neglected. On relating the circumstance at the supper-table, the wife said,—

"I am very sorry that you whipped Jim, for I took him to do some work in the garden, amongst my flower-beds."

To this the Doctor replied, "Never mind, I'll make it all right with Jim."

And sure enough he did, for that night, at prayers, he said, "I am sorry, Jim, that I corrected you, to-day, as your mistress tells me that she set you to work in the flower-garden. Now, Jim," continued he, in a most feeling manner, "I always want to do justice to my servants, and you know that I never abuse any of you intentionally, and now, to-night, I will let you lead in prayer."

Jim thankfully acknowledged the apology, and, with grateful tears, and an overflowing heart, accepted the situation; for Jim aspired to be a preacher, like most colored men, and highly appreciated an opportunity

to show his persuasive powers; and that night the old man made splendid use of the liberty granted to him. After praying for everything generally, and telling the Lord what a great sinner he himself was, he said,—

"Now, Lord, I would specially ax you to try to save marster. You knows dat marster thinks he's mighty good; you knows dat marster says he's gwine to heaven; but Lord, I have my doubts; an' yet I want marster saved. Please to convert him over agin; take him, dear Lord, by de nap of de neck, and shake him over hell and show him his condition. But, Lord, don't let him fall into hell, jes let him see whar he ought to go to, but don't let him go dar. An' now, Lord, ef you jes save marster, I will give you de glory."

The indignation expressed by the doctor, at the close of Jim's prayer, told the old negro that for once he had overstepped the mark. "What do you mean, Jim, by insulting me in that manner? Asking the Lord to convert me over again. And praying that I might be shaken over hell. I have a great mind to tie you up, and give you a good correcting. If you ever make another such a prayer, I'll whip you well, that I will."

Dr. Gaines felt so intensely the duty of masters to their slaves that he, with some of his neighbors, inaugurated a religious movement, whereby the blacks at the Corners could have preaching once a fortnight, and that, too, by an educated white man. Rev. John Mason, the man selected for this work, was a heavy-set, fleshy, lazy man who, when entering a house, sought the nearest chair, taking possession of it, and holding it to the last.

He had been employed many years as a colporteur or missionary, sometimes preaching to the poor whites, and, at other times, to the slaves, for which service he was compensated either by planters, or by the dominant religious denomination in the section where he labored. Mr. Mason had carefully studied the character of the people to whom he was called to preach, and took every opportunity to shirk his duties, and to throw them upon some of the slaves, a large number of whom were always ready and willing to exhort when called upon.

We shall never forget his first sermon, and the profound sensation

that it created both amongst masters and slaves, and especially the latter.[7] After taking for his text, "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes," he spoke substantially as follows:—

"Now when *correction* is given you, you either deserve it, or you do not deserve it. But whether you really deserve it or not, it is your duty, and Almighty God requires that you bear it patiently. You may, perhaps, think that this is hard doctrine, but if you consider it right you must needs think otherwise of it. Suppose then, that you deserve correction, you cannot but say that it is just and right you should meet with it. Suppose you do not, or at least you do not deserve so much, or so severe a correction for the fault you have committed, you, perhaps, have escaped a great many more, and are at last paid for all. Or suppose you are quite innocent of what is laid to your charge, and suffer wrongfully in that particular thing, is it not possible you may have done some other bad thing which was never discovered, and that Almighty God, who saw you doing it, would not let you escape without punishment one time or another? And ought you not, in such a case, to give glory to Him, and be thankful that he would rather punish you in this life for your wickedness, than destroy your souls for it in the next life? But suppose that even this was not the case (a case hardly to be imagined), and that you have by no means, known or unknown, deserved the correction you suffered, there is this great comfort in it, that if you bear it patiently, and leave your cause in the hands of God, he will reward you for it in heaven, and the punishment you suffer unjustly here, shall turn to your exceeding great glory, hereafter."

At this point, the preacher hesitated a moment, and then continued, "I am now going to give you a description of hell, that awful place, that you will surely go to, if you don't be good and faithful servants.

"Hell is a great pit, more than two hundred feet deep, and is walled

7. The scene that follows reprises the scene of the Sunday slave sermon in *Clotel*, with additions and elaborations (see chapter 4).

up with stone, having a strong, iron grating at the top. The fire is built of pitch pine knots, tar barrels, lard kegs, and butter firkins. One of the devil's imps appears twice a day, and throws about half a bushel of brimstone on the fire, which is never allowed to cease burning. As sinners die they are pitched headlong into the pit, and are at once taken up upon the pitchforks by the devil's imps, who stand, with glaring eyes and smiling countenances, ready to do their master's work."

Here the speaker was disturbed by the "Amens," "Bless God, I'll keep out of hell," "Dat's my sentiments," which plainly told him that he had struck the right key.

"Now," continued the preacher, "I will tell you where heaven is, and how you are to obtain a place there. Heaven is above the skies; its streets are paved with gold; seraphs and angels will furnish you with music which never ceases. You will all be permitted to join in the singing and you will be fed on manna and honey, and you will drink from fountains, and will ride in golden chariots."

"I am bound for hebben," ejaculated one.

"Yes, blessed God, hebben will be my happy home," said another.

These outbursts of feeling were followed, while the man of God stood with folded arms, enjoying the sensation that his eloquence had created.

After pausing a moment or two, the reverend man continued, "Are there any of you here who would rather burn in hell than rest in heaven? Remember that once in hell you can never get out. If you attempt to escape little devils are stationed at the top of the pit, who will, with their pitchforks, toss you back into the pit, *curchunk*, where you must remain forever. But once in heaven, you will be free the balance of your days." Here the wildest enthusiasm showed itself, amidst which the preacher took his seat.

A rather humorous incident now occurred which created no little merriment amongst the blacks, and to the somewhat discomfiture of Dr. Gaines,—who occupied a seat with the whites who were present.

Looking about the room, being unacquainted with the negroes, and

presuming that all or nearly so were experimentally interested in religion, Mr. Mason called on Ike to close with prayer. The very announcement of Ike's name in such a connection called forth a broad grin from the larger portion of the audience.

Now, it so happened that Ike not only made no profession of religion, but was in reality the farthest off from the church of any of the servants at "Poplar Farm"; yet Ike was equal to the occasion, and at once responded, to the great amazement of his fellow slaves.

Ike had been, from early boyhood, an attendant upon whites, and he had learned to speak correctly for an uneducated person. He was pretty well versed in Scripture and had learned the principal prayer that his master was accustomed to make, and would often get his follow-servants together at the barn on a rainy day and give them the prayer, with such additions and improvements as the occasion might suggest. Therefore, when called upon by Mr. Mason, Ike at once said, "Let us pray."

After floundering about for a while, as if feeling his way, the new beginner struck out on the well-committed prayer, and soon elicited a loud "amen," and "bless God for that," from Mr. Mason, and to the great amusement of the blacks. In his eagerness, however, to make a grand impression, Ike attempted to weave into his prayer some poetry on "Cock Robin," which he had learned, and which nearly spoiled his maiden prayer.[8]

After the close of the meeting, the Doctor invited the preacher to remain over night, and accepting the invitation, we in the great house had an opportunity of learning more of the reverend man's religious views.

When comfortably seated in the parlor, the Doctor said, "I was well pleased with your discourse, I think the tendency will be good upon the servants."

"Yes," responded the minister, "The negro is eminently a religious being, more so, I think, than the white race. He is emotional, loves mu-

8. The reference is to the traditional English nursery rhyme "Who Killed Cock Robin?" which has spread across the English-speaking world since its initial publication in 1744.

sic, is wonderfully gifted with gab; the organ of alimentativeness largely developed, and is fond of approbation.[9] I therefore try always to satisfy their vanity; call upon them to speak, sing, and pray, and sometimes to preach. That suits for this world. Then I give them a heaven with music in it, and with something to eat. Heaven without singing and food would be no place for the negro. In the cities, where many of them are free, and have control of their own time, they are always late to church meetings, lectures, or almost anything else. But let there be a festival or supper announced and they are all there on time."

"But did you know," said Dr. Gaines, "that the prayer that Ike made to-day he learned from me?"

"Indeed?" responded the minister.

"Yes, that boy has the imitative power of his race in a larger degree than most negroes that I have seen.[10] He remembers nearly everything that he hears, is full of wit, and has most excellent judgment. However, his dovetailing the Cock Robin poetry into my prayer was too much, and I had to laugh at his adroitness."

The Doctor was much pleased with the minister, but Mrs. Gaines was not. She had great contempt for professional men who sprung from the lower class, and she regarded Mr. Mason as one to be endured but not encouraged. The Rev. Henry Pinchen was her highest idea of a clergyman. This gentleman was then expected in the neighborhood, and she made special reference to the fact, to her husband, when speaking of the "negro missionary," as she was wont to call the new-comer.

The preparation made, a few days later, for the reception of Mrs. Gaines' favorite spiritual adviser, showed plainly that a religious feast was near at hand, and in which the lady was to play a conspicuous part; and

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9. Mason is reciting commonly held racialist views of blacks as naturally pliant, faithful, emotional, outer-directed creatures, a view operative even in the antislavery *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Mason adds to this standard vocabulary the pseudopsychological, phrenological term *alimentativeness*: an excessive fondness for food.

10. Gaines's view of blacks as naturally gifted imitators was a commonplace white belief.

whether her husband was prepared to enter into the enjoyment or not, he would have to tolerate considerable noise and bustle for a week.[11]

"Go, Hannah," said Mrs. Gaines, "and tell Dolly to kill a couple of fat pullets, and to put the biscuit to rise. I expect Brother Pinchen here this afternoon, and I want everything in order. Hannah, Hannah, tell Melinda to come here. We mistresses do have a hard time in this world; I don't see why the Lord should have imposed such heavy duties on us poor mortals. Well, it can't last always. I long to leave this wicked world, and go home to glory."

At the hurried appearance of the waiting maid the mistress said: "I am to have company this afternoon, Melinda. I expect Brother Pinchen here, and I want everything in order. Go and get one of my new caps, with the lace border, and get out my scalloped-bottomed dimity petticoat, and when you go out, tell Hannah to clean the white-handled knives, and see that not a speck is on them; for I want everything as it should be while Brother Pinchen is here."

Mr. Pinchen was possessed with a large share of the superstition that prevails throughout the South, not only with the ignorant negro, who brought it with him from his native land, but also by a great number of well educated and influential whites.

On the first afternoon of the reverend gentleman's visit, I listened with great interest to the following conversation between Mrs. Gaines and her ministerial friend.

"Now, Brother Pinchen, do give me some of your experience since you were last here. It always does my soul good to hear religious experience. It draws me nearer and nearer to the Lord's side. I do love to hear good news from God's people."

"Well, Sister Gaines," said the preacher, "I've had great opportunities in my time to study the heart of man. I've attended a great many camp-meetings, revival meetings, protracted meetings, and death-bed scenes,

11. The scene that follows between Mrs. Gaines and Brother Pinchen reprises nearly verbatim the scene between the identically named characters in *The Escape* (see chapter 5).

and I am satisfied, Sister Gaines, that the heart of man is full of sin, and desperately wicked. This is a wicked world, Sister Gaines, a wicked world."

"Were you ever in Arkansas, Brother Pinchen?" inquired Mrs. Gaines; "I've been told that the people out there are very ungodly."

Mr. P. "Oh, yes, Sister Gaines. I once spent a year at Little Rock, and preached in all the towns round about there; and I found some hard cases out there, I can tell you. I was once spending a week in a district where there were a great many horse thieves, and, one night, somebody stole my pony. Well, I knowed it was no use to make a fuss, so I told Brother Tarbox to say nothing about it, and I'd get my horse by preaching God's everlasting gospel; for I had faith in the truth, and knowed that my Saviour would not let me lose my pony. So the next Sunday I preached on horse-stealing, and told the brethren to come up in the evenin' with their hearts filled with the grace of God. So that night the house was crammed brimfull with anxious souls, panting for the bread of life. Brother Bingham opened with prayer, and Brother Tarbox followed, and I saw right off that we were gwine to have a blessed time. After I got 'em pretty well warmed up, I jumped on to one of the seats, stretched out my hands and said: 'I know who stole my pony; I've found out; and you are in here tryin' to make people believe that you've got religion; but you ain't got it. And if you don't take my horse back to Brother Tarbox's pasture this very night, I'll tell your name right out in meetin' to-morrow night. Take my pony back, you vile and wretched sinner, and come up here and give your heart to God.' So the next mornin', I went out to Brother Tarbox's pasture, and sure enough, there was my bob-tail pony. Yes, Sister Gaines, there he was, safe and sound. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. G. "Oh, how interesting, and how fortunate for you to get your pony! And what power there is in the gospel! God's children are very lucky. Oh, it is so sweet to sit here and listen to such good news from God's people! *[Aside.]* 'You Hannah, what are you standing there listening for, and neglecting your work? Never mind, my lady, I'll whip you well when I am done here. Go at your work this moment, you lazy huzzy! Never mind, I'll whip you well.' Come, do go on, Brother Pinchen, with

your godly conversation. It is so sweet! It draws me nearer and nearer to the Lord's side."

Mr. P. "Well, Sister Gaines, I've had some mighty queer dreams in my time, that I have. You see, one night I dreamed that I was dead and in heaven, and such a place I never saw before. As soon as I entered the gates of the celestial empire, I saw many old and familiar faces that I had seen before. The first person that I saw was good old Elder Pike, the preacher that first called my attention to religion. The next person I saw was Deacon Billings, my first wife's father, and then I saw a host of godly faces. Why, Sister Gaines, you knowed Elder Goosbee, didn't you?"

Mrs. G. "Why, yes; did you see him there? He married me to my first husband."

Mr. P. "Oh, yes, Sister Gaines, I saw the old Elder, and he looked for all the world as if he had just come out of a revival meetin'."

Mrs. G. "Did you see my first husband there, Brother Pinchen?"

Mr. P. "No, Sister Gaines, I didn't see Brother Pepper there; but I've no doubt but that Brother Pepper was there."

Mrs. G. "Well, I don't know; I have my doubts. He was not the happiest man in the world. He was always borrowing trouble about something or another. Still, I saw some happy moments with Mr. Pepper. I was happy when I made his acquaintance, happy during our courtship, happy a while after our marriage, and happy when he died." *[Weeps.]*

Hannah. "Massa Pinchen, did you see my ole man Ben up dar in hebben?"

Mr. P. "No, Hannah, I didn't go amongst the niggers."

Mrs. G. "No, of course Brother Pinchen didn't go among the blacks. What are you asking questions for? [*Aside.*] 'Never mind, my lady, I'll whip you well when I'm done here. I'll skin you from head to foot.' Do go on with your heavenly conversation, Brother Pinchen; it does my very soul good. This is indeed a precious moment for me. I do love to hear of Christ and Him crucified."

Mr. P. "Well, Sister Gaines, I promised Sister Daniels that I'd come over and see her a few moments this evening, and have a little season of prayer with her, and I suppose I must go."

Mrs. G. "If you must go, then I'll have to let you; but before you do, I wish to get your advice upon a little matter that concerns Hannah. Last week Hannah stole a goose, killed it, cooked it, and she and her man Sam had a fine time eating the goose; and her master and I would never have known anything about it if it had not been for Cato, a faithful servant, who told his master all about it. And then, you see, Hannah had to be severely whipped before she'd confess that she stole the goose. Next Sabbath is sacrament day, and I want to know if you think that Hannah is fit to go to the Lord's Supper, after stealing the goose."

"Well, Sister Gaines," responded the minister, "that depends on circumstances. If Hannah has confessed that she stole the goose, and has been sufficiently whipped, and has begged her master's pardon, and begged your pardon, and thinks she will not do the like again, why then I suppose she can go to the Lord's Supper; for —

> While the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return.[12]

But she must be sure that she has repented, and won't steal any more."

"Do you hear that, Hannah?" said the mistress. "For my part," continued she, "I don't think she's fit to go to the Lord's Supper; for she had no cause to steal the goose. We give our servants plenty of good food. They have a full run to the meal-tub, meat once a fortnight, and all the sour milk on the place, and I am sure that's enough for any one. I do think that our negroes are the most ungrateful creatures in the world. They aggravate my life out of me."

During this talk on the part of the mistress, the servant stood listening with careful attention, and at its close Hannah said: —

"I know, missis, dat I stole de goose, an' massa whip me for it, an' I confess it, an' I is sorry for it. But, missis, I is gwine to de Lord's Supper, next Sunday, kase I ain't agwine to turn my back on my bressed Lord an'

12. This well-known rhyme comes from the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* of Isaac Watts (1674–1748), a popular English religious poet and major figure of English hymnody.

Massa for no old tough goose, dat I ain't." And here the servant wept as if she would break her heart.

Mr. Pinchen, who seemed moved by Hannah's words, gave a sympathizing look at the negress, and said, "Well, Sister Gaines, I suppose I must go over and see Sister Daniels; she'll be waiting for me."

After seeing the divine out, Mrs. Gaines said, "Now, Hannah, Brother Pinchen is gone, do you get the cowhide and follow me to the cellar, and I'll whip you well for aggravating me as you have to-day. It seems as if I can never sit down to take a little comfort with the Lord, without you crossing me. The devil always puts it into your head to disturb me, just when I am trying to serve the Lord. I've no doubt but that I'll miss going to heaven on your account. But I'll whip you well before I leave this world, that I will. Get the cowhide and follow me to the cellar."

In a few minutes the lady returned to the parlor, followed by the servant whom she had been correcting, and she was in a high state of perspiration, and, on taking a seat, said, "Get the fan, Hannah, and fan me; you ought to be ashamed of yourself to put me into such a passion, and cause me to heat myself up in this way, whipping you. You know that it is a great deal harder for me than it is for you. I have to exert myself, and it puts me all in a fever; while you have only to stand and take it."

On the following Sabbath,—it being Communion,—Mr. Pinchen officiated. The church being at the Corners, a mile or so from "Poplar Farm," the Communion wine, which was kept at the Doctor's, was sent over by the boy, Billy. It happened to be in the month of April, when the maple trees had been tapped, and the sap freely running.

Billy, while passing through the "sugar camp," or sap bush, stopped to take a drink of the sap, which looked inviting in the newly-made troughs. All at once it occurred to the lad that he could take a drink of the wine, and fill it up with sap. So, acting upon this thought, the youngster put the decanter to his mouth, and drank freely, lowering the beverage considerably in the bottle.

But filling the bottle with the sap was much more easily contemplated than done. For, at every attempt, the water would fall over the sides, none

going in. However, the boy, with the fertile imagination of his race, soon conceived the idea of sucking his mouth full of the sap, and then squirting it into the bottle. This plan succeeded admirably, and the slave boy sat in the church gallery that day, and wondered if the communicants would have partaken so freely of the wine, if they had known that his mouth had been the funnel through which a portion of it had passed.

Slavery has had the effect of brightening the mental powers of the negro to a certain extent, especially those brought into close contact with the whites.

It is also a fact, that these blacks felt that when they could get the advantage of their owners, they had a perfect right to do so; and the boy, Billy, no doubt, entertained a consciousness that he had done a very cunning thing in thus drinking the wine entrusted to his care.

Chapter 19

[Scenes from Postbellum South]

Brown drew on his recent excursion through Tennessee, Alabama, and Virginia for the last third of the book to offer his commentary on the state of the postbellum South. What he witnessed was a world in convulsion. If on earlier trips he had seen the aftermath of the destruction wrought by a war of unprecedented ferocity, he now saw the continuing turmoil of social reformation and counterreformation in the wake of Reconstruction and its gradual reversal.

The disarray he witnessed was the result of social, economic, and political changes too radical to be easily absorbed by people on either side of the color line. In chapter 19 he explores the effects of an altered basis not only for interracial but also for intraracial relations within the African American community. In typical fashion he examines the scene from shifting perspectives, clinically from the outside and anecdotally from within.

Spending part of the winter of 1880 in Tennessee, I began the study of the character of the people and their institutions. I soon learned that there existed an intense hatred on the part of the whites, toward the col-

ored population. Looking at the past, this was easily accounted for. The older whites, brought up in the lap of luxury, educated to believe themselves superior to the race under them, self-willed, arrogant, determined, skilled in the use of side-arms, wealthy — possessing the entire political control of the State — feeling themselves superior also to the citizens of the free States, — this people was called upon to subjugate themselves to an ignorant, superstitious, and poverty-stricken, race — a race without homes, or the means of obtaining them; to see the offices of State filled by men selected from this servile set made these whites feel themselves deeply degraded in the eyes of the world. Their power was gone, but their pride still remained. They submitted in silence, but "bided their time," and said: "Never mind; we'll yet make your hell a hot one."[13]

The blacks felt their importance, saw their own power in national politics, were interviewed by obsequious and cringing white men from the North — men, many of them, far inferior, morally, to the negro. Two-faced, second-class white men of the South, few in number, it is true, hung like leeches upon the blacks. Among the latter was a respectable proportion of free men — free before the Rebellion; these were comparatively well educated; to these and to the better class of freedmen the country was to look for solid work. In the different State Legislatures, the great battle was to be fought, and to these the interest of the South centred. All of the Legislatures were composed mainly of colored men. The few whites that were there were not only no help to the blacks, but it would have been better for the character of the latter, and for the country at large, if most of them had been in some State prison.

Colored men went into the Legislatures somewhat as children go for the first time to a Sabbath school. They sat and waited to see "the show." Many had been elected by constituencies, of which not more than ten in

13. Brown's assessment of the aggrieved mentality of many postwar Southern whites corresponds closely to the fictional world of *A Fool's Errand*, a best-selling novel published in 1879. Its author, Albion Tourgée (1838–1905), a former Union army officer and civil rights advocate, based it closely on his embattled experience as a Republican-appointed judge serving in North Carolina during Reconstruction.

a hundred could read the ballots they deposited; and a large number of these Representatives could not write their own names.[14]

This was not their fault. Their want of education was attributable to the system of slavery through which they had passed, and the absence of the educated intelligent whites of the South, was not the fault of the colored men. This was a trying position for the recently-enfranchised blacks, but nobly did they rise above the circumstances. The speeches made by some of these men exhibited a depth of thought, flights of eloquence, and civilized statesmanship, that throw their former masters far in the back-ground. Yet, amongst the good done, bills were introduced and passed, giving State aid to unworthy objects, old, worn-out corporations re-galvanized, bills for outrageous new frauds drawn up by white men, and presented by blacks; votes of both colors bought up, bills passed, money granted, and these ignorant men congratulated as "Statesmen."

While this "Comedy of Errors" was being performed at the South, and loudly applauded at the North, these very Northern men, who had yelled their throats sore, would have fainted at the idea of a negro being elected a member of their own Legislature.

By and by came the reaction.[15] The disfranchised whites of the South submitted, but complained. Northern men and women, the latter, always the most influential, sympathized with the dog underneath. As the tide was turning, the white adventurers returned from the South with piles of green-backs, and said that they had been speculating in cotton; but their neighbors knew that it was stolen, for they had been members of Southern Legislatures.

While Northern carpet-baggers were scudding off to their kennels with their ill-gotten gains, the Southern colored politicians were driving

14. The scene of new black enfranchisement and political representation accurately captures the topsy-turvy quality of political life in the South under Reconstruction.

15. At the time that Brown was writing, the forces of reaction were setting in across the South on a state-by-state basis, reclaiming white power and instituting Jim Crow segregationist policies.

fast horses, their wives in their fine carriages; and men, who, five years before were working in the cotton field under the lash, could now draw their checks for thousands.[16]

This extravagance of black men, followed by the heavy taxes, reminded the old Southerners of their defeat in the Rebellion; it brought up thoughts of revenge; Northern sympathy emboldened them at the South, which resulted in the Ku-Klux organizations, and the reign of terror that has cursed the South ever since.[17]

The restoring of the rebels to power and the surrendering the colored people to them, after using the latter in the war, and at the ballot box, creating an enmity between the races, is the most bare-faced ingratitude that history gives any account of.

After all, the ten years of negro Legislation in the South challenges the profoundest study of mankind. History does not record a similar instance. Five millions of uneducated, degraded people, without any preparation whatever, set at liberty in a single day, without shedding a drop of blood, burning a barn, or insulting a single female. They reconstructed the State Governments that their masters had destroyed; became Legislators, held State offices, and with all their blunders, surpassed the whites that had preceded them. Future generations will marvel at the calm forbearance, good sense, and Christian zeal of the American Negro of the nineteenth century.

Nothing has been left undone to cripple their energies, darken their minds, debase their moral sense, and obliterate all traces of their relationship to the rest of mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have

16. *Carpetbagger* was the term of derision used chiefly by Southerners to delineate what they saw as Northern opportunists who descended on the South to seek private enrichment at the expense of a prostrate people.

17. One outgrowth of Southern white reaction was the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist organization that was first organized locally in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866 but spread quickly across the whole of the South. Many of its members were Confederate veterans, who used terror tactics against both blacks and their white supporters. Northern reaction to the activities of the Klan was far from uniformly hostile.

sustained the mighty load of oppression under which they have groaned for thousands of years.

After looking at the past history of both races, I could easily see the cause of the great antipathy of the white man to the black, here in Tennessee. This feeling was most forcibly illustrated by an incident that occurred one day while I was standing in front of the Knoxville House, in Knoxville. A good-looking, well-dressed colored man approached a white man, in a business-like manner, and began talking to him, but ere he had finished the question, the white raised his walking stick, and with much force, knocked off the black man's hat, and with an oath said, "Don't you know better than to speak to a white man with your hat on, where's your manners?" The negro picked up his hat, held it in his hand, and resumed the conversation.

I inquired of the colored gentleman with whom I was talking, who the parties were; he replied, — "The white man is a real estate dealer, and the colored man is Hon. Mr. —, ex-member of the General Assembly."

This race feeling is still more forcibly set forth in the dastardly attack of John Warren, of Huntingdon.[18] The wife of this ruffian, while passing through one of the streets of that town, was accidentally run against by Miss Florence Hayes, who offered ample apology, and which would have been accepted by any well-bred lady. However, Mrs. Warren would not be satisfied with anything less than the punishment of the young lady. Therefore, the two-fisted, coarse, rough, uncouth ex-slave-holder, proceeded to Miss Hayes' residence, gained admission, and without a word of ceremony seized the young lady by the hair, and began beating her with his fist, and kicking her with his heavy boots.

Not until his victim lay prostrate and senseless at his feet, did this fiend cease his blows. Miss Hayes was teaching school at Huntingdon when this outrage was committed, and so severe was the barbarous attack, that she was compelled to return to her home at Nashville, where she was con-

18. Huntingdon is a small town in western Tennessee located about one hundred miles northeast of Memphis.

fined to her room for several weeks. Yet, neither law nor public opinion could reach this monster.

A few days after the assault, the following paragraph appeared in the Huntingdon *Vindicator*:

"The occurrences of the past two weeks in the town of Huntingdon should prove conclusively to the colored citizens that there is a certain line existing between themselves and the white people which they cannot cross with impunity. The incident which prompts us to write this article, is the thrashing which a white gentleman administered to a colored woman last week. With no wish to foster a spirit of lawlessness in this community, but actuated by a desire to see the negro keep in his proper place, we advise white men everywhere to *stand up for their rights*, and in no case yield an inch to the encroachment of an inferior race."[19]

"Stand up for their rights," with this editor, means for the white ruffianly coward to knock down every colored lady that does not give up the entire sidewalk to him or his wife.

It was my good fortune to meet on several occasions Miss Florence T. Hayes, the young lady above alluded to, and I never came in contact with a more retiring, lady-like person in my life. She is a student of Tennessee Central College, where she bears an unstained reputation, and is regarded by all who know her to possess intellectual gifts far superior to the average white young women of Tennessee.[20]

Spending a night in the country, we had just risen from the supper-table when mine host said:

"Listen, Mingo is telling how he re-converted his daughter; listen,

19. Southern newspapers often took the lead in local politics, whether promoting a segregationist or a progressive politics.

20. Tennessee Central College, founded in Nashville in 1865 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was one of the many institutions of primary, secondary, and higher education established for African Americans in the South right after the Civil War. At the time Brown wrote, the school was in a phase of rapid expansion, which resulted in the addition of departments of medicine, law, and dentistry to its core disciplines of theology and pedagogy.

you'll hear a rich story, and a true one." Mr. Mingo lived in the adjoining room.

"Yes, Mrs. Jones; my darter has bin home wissitin' me, an' I had a mighty trial wid her, I can tell yer."

"What was the matter, Mr. Mingo?" inquired the visitor.

"Well, yer see, Fanny's bin a-livin' in Philamadelfy, an' she's a mighty changed 'oman in her ways. When she come in de house, she run up to her mammy and say,—'O! mar, I'm exquisitely pleased to greet you.' Den she run ter me an' sed,—'O! par,' an' kiss me. Well, dat was all well enuff, but to see as much as two yards of her dress a-dragin' behind her on de floor, it was too much,—an' it were silk, too. It made my heart ache. Ses I,—'Fanny, you's very stravagant, dragin' all dat silk on de floor in dat way.' 'O!' sed she, 'that's the fashion, par.' Den, yer see, I were uneasy for her. I were 'fraid she'd fall, for she had on a pair of boots wid the highess heels I eber see in my life, which made her walk as if she were walkin' on her toes. Den, she were covered all over wid ribbons and ruffles.

"When we set down to dinner, Fanny eat wid her fork, an' when she see her sister put de knife in her mouf, she ses,—'don't put your knife in your mouth; that's vulgar.' Nex' mornin', she took out of her pocket some seeds, an' put 'em in a tin cup, an' pour bilin' hot water on 'em. Ses I,—'Fanny, is yer sick, an' gwine to take some medicine?'

"'O! no, par, it's quince seed, to make some gum-stick-um.'

"'What is dat fer?' I axed.

"'Why, par, it's to make Grecian waves on my forehead. Some call them "scallopes." We ladies in the city make them. You see, par, we comb our hair down in little waves, and the gum makes them stick close to the forehead. All the white ladies in the city wear them; it's all the fashion.'

"Well, yer see, Mrs. Jones, I could stand all dat, but when we went to prayers, I ax Fanny to lead in prayer; an' when dat gal got on her knees and took out of her pocket a gilt-edge book, and read a prayer, den I were done, I ax myself is it possible dat my darter is come to dat. So, when prayer were over, I sed: 'Fanny, what kind of religion is dat yer's

got?' Sed she,—'Why, par, I em a Piscopion.' 'What is dat?' I axed. 'That's the English Church service.' 'Den yer's no more a Methodist?' 'O! no,' said she, 'to be a Piscopion is all the fashion.'"

"Stop, Mr. Mingo," sed Mrs. Jones; "what kind of religion is dat? Is it Baptiss?"

"No, no," replied the old man; "ef it were Baptiss, den I could a-stood dat, kase de Baptiss religion will do when yer can't get no better. For wid all dey faults, I believe de Baptiss ken get into hebben by a tight squeeze. Kase, yer see, Mrs. Jones, I is a Methodiss, an' I believes in ole-time religion, an' I wants my chillen to meet me in hebben. So, I jess went right down on my knees an' ax de Lord to show me my juty about Fanny, for I wanted to win her back to de ole-time religion. Well, de Lord made it all plain to me, an' follerin' de Lord's message to me, I got right up an' went out into de woods an' cut some switches, an' put 'em in de barn. So I sed to Fanny: 'Come, my darter, out to de barn; I want to give yer a present to take back to Philamadelfy wid yer.'

"'Yes, par,' said she, fer she was a-fixin' de 'gum-stick-um' on her hair. So I went to de barn, an' very soon out come Fanny. I jess shut de door an' fasten it, and took down my switches, an' ax her,—'What kind of religion is dat yer's got?'

"'Piscopion, par.' Den I commence, an' I did give dat gal sech a whippen, and she cry out,—'O! par. O! par, please stop, par.' Den I ax her,—'What kind of religion yer's got?' 'Pis-co-copion,' sed she. So I give her some moo, an' I ax her again,—'What kind of religion is yer got?' She sed,—'O! par, O! par' 'Sed I,—'Don't call me "par." Call me in de right way.' Den she said,—'O! daddy, O! daddy, I is a Methodiss. I is got ole-time religion; please stop an' I'll never be a Piscopion any more.'

"So, yer see, Mrs. Jones, I converted dat gal right back to de ole-time religion, which is de bess of all religion. Yes, de Lord answered my prayer dat time, wid de aid of de switches."

Whether Mingo's conversion of his daughter kept her from joining the Episcopalians, on her return to Philadelphia, or not, I have not learned.

Chapter 22
[Religion in Postbellum Richmond]

Religion was a central component of African American life before and after the Civil War. It was also an important part of Brown's personal experience, and it figured significantly in his writing. Whatever his personal beliefs, however, he rarely took an evangelical approach to its representation. He was more interested in viewing expressions of religion critically as a core register of social formations in white and black American life, as he did during his final visit to the South.

In chapter 22 Brown focuses on the religious life of postbellum Richmond, a city laid low by the war. The damage done to the city's physical and social infrastructure had the ironic effect for its African American residents of partial liberation from earlier constraints. Brown surveyed the results from the detached perspective of an urban anthropologist, sampling the variety of forms of worship among blacks and commenting rather saltily upon them.

Those who recollect the standing of Virginia in days gone by, will be disappointed in her at the present time. The people, both white and black, are poor and proud, all living on their reputation when the "Old Dominion" was considered the first State in the Union.[21]

I viewed Richmond with much interest. The effect of the late Rebellion is still visible everywhere, and especially amongst those who were leaders in society thirty years ago. I walked through the market and observed several men with long, black cloth cloaks, beneath which was a basket. Into this they might be seen to deposit their marketing for the day.

I noticed an old black man bowing very gracefully to one of these individuals, and I inquired who he was. "Ah, massa," said the negro, "dat is Major —, he was berry rich before de war, but de war fotch him right down, and now he ain't able to have servants, and he's too proud to

21. Virginia was the earliest settled of the English colonies and remained one of the most powerful in colonial and early federal times. But it was losing its centrality to the Union even before it was severely damaged by the Civil War, whose most intense fighting was waged on Virginia's soil. Richmond, the Confederate capital, was left in a state of particular devastation.

show his basket, so he covers it up in his cloak." And then the black man smiled and shook his head significantly, and walked on. Standing here in the market place, one beholds many scenes which bring up the days of slavery as seen by the results. Here is a girl with a rich brown skin; after her comes one upon whose cheek a blush can just be distinguished; and I saw one or two young women whose cream-like complexion would have justly excited the envy of many a New York belle. The condition of the women of the latter class is most deplorable. Beautiful almost beyond description, many of them educated and refined, with the best white blood of the South in their veins, it is perhaps only natural that they should refuse to mate themselves with coarse and ignorant black men. Socially, they are not recognized by the whites; they are often without money enough to buy the barest necessaries of life; honorably they can never procure sufficient means to gratify their luxurious tastes; their mothers have taught them how to sin; their fathers they never knew; debauched white men are ever ready to take advantage of their destitution, and after living a short life of shame and dishonor they sink into early and unhallowed graves. Living, they were despised by whites and blacks alike; dead, they are mourned by none.

I went to hear the somewhat celebrated negro preacher, Rev. John Jasper.[22] The occasion was one of considerable note, he having preached, and by request, a sermon to prove that the "Sun do move," and now he was to give it at the solicitation of forty-five members of the Legislature, who were present as hearers.

Those who wanted the sermon repeated were all whites, a number of whom did it for the fun that they expected to enjoy, while quite a respectable portion, old fogy in opinion, felt that the preacher was right.

On reaching the church, I found twelve carriages and two omnibuses, besides a number of smaller vehicles, lining the street, half an hour be-

22. The "somewhat celebrated" John Jasper (1812–1901) was one of the most famous black preachers of the day. Born into slavery and entirely self-educated, Jasper became well known even in slavery times for his colloquial old-school preaching. He gained greatest fame (and notoriety) in 1878 for his geocentric "Sun Do Move" sermon, which Brown satirizes here.

fore the opening of the doors. However, the whites who had come in these conveyances had been admitted by the side doors, while the streets were crowded with blacks and a poorer class of whites.

By special favor I was permitted to enter before the throng came rushing in. Members of the Legislature were assigned the best seats, indeed, the entire centre of the house was occupied by whites, who, I was informed, were from amongst the F.F.Vs. The church seats one thousand, but it is safe to say that twelve hundred were present at that time.

Rev. John Jasper is a deep black, tall, and slim, with long arms and somewhat round-shouldered, and sixty-five years old. He has preached in Richmond for the last forty-five years, and is considered a very good man. He is a fluent speaker, well versed in Scriptures, and possesses a large amount of wit. The members of Jasper's church are mainly freedmen, a large number of whom are from the country, commonly called "corn-field niggers."

The more educated class of the colored people, I found, did not patronize Jasper. They consider him behind the times, and called him "old fogy." Jasper looked proudly upon his audience, and well he might, for he had before him some of the first men and women of Virginia's capital. But these people had not come to be instructed, they had really come for a good laugh and were not disappointed.

Jasper had prepared for the occasion, and in his opening service saved himself by calling on "Brother Scogin" to offer prayer. This venerable Brother evidently felt the weight of responsibility laid upon him, and discharged the duty, at least to the entire satisfaction of those who were there to be amused. After making a very sensible prayer, Scogin concluded as follows:—"O Lord, we's a mighty abused people, we's had a hard time in slavery, we's been all broken to pieces, we's bow-legged, knock-kneed, bandy-shanked, cross-eyed, and a great many of us is hump-backed. Now, Lord, we wants to be mendid up, an' we wants you to come an' do it. Don't send an angel, for dis is too big a job for an angel. You made us, O Lord, an' you know our wants, an' you can fix us up as nobody else can. Come right down yourself, and come quickly." At this sentence Jasper gave a loud groan, and Scogin ceased. After service was

over I was informed that when Jasper finds any of his members a little too long-winded in prayer, singing, or speaking, he gives that significant groan, which they all well understand. It means "enough."

The church was now completely jammed, and it was said that two thousand people sought admission in vain. Jasper's text was "God is a God of War."[23] The preacher, though wrong in his conclusions, was happy in his quotations, fresh in his memory, and eloquently impressed his views upon his hearers.

He said, "If the sun does not move, why did Joshua command it to 'stand still?"[24] Was Joshua wrong? If so, I had rather be wrong with Joshua than to be right with the modern philosophers. If this earth moves, the chimneys would be falling, tumbling in upon the roofs of the houses, the mountains and hills would be changing and levelling down, the rivers would be emptying out. You and I would be standing on our heads. Look at that mountain standing out yonder; it stood there fifty years ago when I was a boy. Would it be standing there if the earth was running round as they tell us?"

"No, blessed God," cried a Sister. Then the laugh came, and Jasper stood a moment with his arms folded. He continued: "The sun rises in the east and sets in the west; do you think any one can make me believe that the earth can run around the world in a single day so as to give the sun a chance to set in the west?"

"No, siree, that doctrine don't go down with Jasper."

At this point the preacher paused for breath, and I heard an elderly white in an adjoining pew, say, in a somewhat solemn tone — "Jasper is right, the sun moves."

Taking up his bandanna, and wiping away the copious perspiration that flowed down his dusky cheeks, the preacher opened a note which had just been laid upon the desk, read it, and continued, — "A question is

23. The biblical text is presumably misquoted (whether by Jasper or Brown) from Exodus 15:3: "God is a man of war."

24. The allusion is to the biblical account of Joshua's staying the movement of the sun and moon for a period of hours (Joshua 10:12–14).

here asked me, and one that I am glad to answer, because a large number of my people, as well as others, can't see how the children of Israel were able to cross the Red Sea in safety, while Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned. I have told you again and again that everything was possible with God. But that don't seem to satisfy you.

"Those who doubt these things that you read in Holy Writ are like the infidel,—won't believe unless you can see the cause. Well, let me tell you. The infidel says that when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, it was in winter, and the sea was frozen over. This is a mistake, or an intentional misrepresentation."[25] Here the preacher gave vivid accounts of the sufferings and flight of the children of Israel, whose case he likened to the colored people of the South. The preacher wound up with an eloquent appeal to his congregation not to be led astray by "these new-fangled notions."

Great excitement is just now taking hold of the people upon the seeming interest that the colored inhabitants are manifesting in the Catholic religion. The Cathedral in Richmond is thrown open every Sunday evening to the blacks, when the bishop himself preaches to them, and it is not strange that the eloquent and persuasive voice of Bishop Kean, who says to the negro, "My dear beloved brethren," should captivate these despised people.[26] I attended a meeting at the large African Baptist Church, where the Rev. Moses D. Hoge, D.D., was to preach to the colored people against Catholicism.[27] Dr. Hoge, though noted for his eloquence, and terribly in earnest, could not rise higher in his appeals to the blacks than to say "men and women" to them.

The contrast was noticeable to all. After hearing Dr. Hoge through I asked an intelligent colored man how he liked his sermon. His reply

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25. The Sinai Peninsula lies on roughly the same latitude as Florida.

26. John Joseph Keane, a native of Ireland, was appointed bishop of the Richmond diocese in 1878. During his decade of service in Richmond, he reached out to blacks as well as whites. He later became the first rector of the Catholic University of America.

27. Moses D. Hoge (1819–99) was a leading Presbyterian minister in Richmond renowned for his pulpit eloquence. During the Civil War he was a strong supporter of the Confederacy, running the transatlantic Union blockade to keep soldiers stocked with religious literature.

was: "If Dr. Hoge is in earnest, why don't he open his own church and invite us in and preach to us there? Before he can make any impression on us, he must go to the Catholic Church and learn the spirit of brotherly love."

One Sunday, Bishop Kean said to the colored congregation, numbering twelve hundred, who had come to hear him: "There are distinctions in the business and in the social world, but there are no distinctions in the spiritual. A soul is a soul before God, may it be a black or a white man's. God is no respecter of persons, the Christian Church cannot afford to be. The people who would not let you learn to read before the war, are the ones now that accuse me of trying to use you for political purposes.

"Now, my dear beloved brethren, when I attempt to tell you how to vote, you need not come to hear me preach any more."

The blacks have been so badly treated in the past that kind words and social recognition will do much to win them in the future, for success will not depend so much upon their matter as upon their manner; not so much upon their faith as upon the more potent direct influence of their practice. In this the Catholics of the South have the inside track, for the prejudice of the Protestants seems in a fair way to let the negro go anywhere except to heaven, if they have to go the same way.

Chapter 23

[African American Folkways]

Brown loved African American folk culture and sampled it throughout his work, as he does richly in chapter 23. He paid particular attention to its sounds and songs, which he had recorded as far back as 1848 in a volume of antislavery songs compiled on behalf of the movement. Reproducing the songs of African Americans in 1880, however, had a different valence, given the altered context for the reception of African American life in Jim Crow America. Even his own relation to this scene, as well as to other scenes of everyday African American life recorded in the book, comes across as slightly uneasy.

What to make of African American life and culture was not only Brown's concern;

it was a growing concern of the culture in general. Brown would have been offended by the title of urban ethnologist or anthropologist, but the interest he shows here in his people's folkways was soon to emerge as a major subject area of late-nineteenth-century American writing. His recording of African Americans' speech and customs anticipates the representation of African American folk culture that would take place during the next 125 years, as later generations of researchers would go down South to record with still cameras, movie cameras, and tape recorders the sights and sounds of the culture that Brown captures in print here.

Norfolk is the place above all others, where the "old-Verginny-never-tire" colored people of the olden time may be found in their purity. Here nearly everybody lives out of doors in the warm weather. This is not confined to the blacks. On the sidewalks, in front of the best hotels, under the awnings at store-doors, on the door-sills of private houses, and on the curbstones in the streets, may be seen people of all classes. But the blacks especially give the inside of the house a wide berth in the summer.

I went to the market, for I always like to visit the markets on Saturday, for there you see "life among the lowly," as you see it nowhere else. Colored men and women have a respectable number of stalls in the Norfolk market, the management of which does them great credit.

But the costermongers, or street-venders, are the men of music. "Here's yer nice vegables — green corn, butter beans, taters, Irish taters, new, jess bin digged; come an' get 'em while dey is fresh. Now's yer time; squash, Calafony quash, bess in de worl'; come an' git 'em now; it'll be Sunday termorrer, an' I'll be gone to church. Big fat Mexican peas, marrer fat squash, Protestant squash, good Catholic vegables of all kinds."

Now's yer time to git snap-beans,
Okra, tomatoes, an' taters gwine by;
Don't be foolish virgins;
Hab de dinner ready
When de master he comes home,
Snap-beans gwine by.

Just then the vender broke forth in a most musical voice:

Oh! Hannah, boil dat cabbage down,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
And turn dem buckwheats round and round,
Hannah, boil 'em down.
It's almost time to blow de horn,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
To call de boys dat hoe de corn,
Hannah, boil 'em down.

Hannah, boil 'em down,
De cabbage just pulled out de ground,
Boil 'em in de pot,
And make him smoking hot.

. . . . . .

Some like de cabbage made in krout,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
Dey eat so much dey get de gout,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
Dey chops 'em up and let dem spoil,
Hannah, boil 'em, down;
I'd rather hab my cabbage boiled,
Hannah, boil 'em down.

Some say dat possum's in de pan,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
Am de sweetest meat in all de land,
Hannah, boil 'em down;
But dar is dat ole cabbage head,
Hannah, boil 'em down,
I'll prize it, children, till I's dead,
Hannah, boil 'em down.[28]

28. This song, like the one that follows, had been a popular one since slavery.

This song, given in his inimitable manner, drew the women to the windows, and the crowd around the vegetable man in the street, and he soon disposed of the contents of his cart. Other venders who "toted" their commodities about in baskets on their heads, took advantage of the musical man's company to sell their own goods. A woman with some really fine strawberries, put forth her claims in a very interesting song; the interest, however, centered more upon the manner than the matter:—

"I live fore miles out of town,
I am gwine to glory.
My strawberries are sweet an' soun',
I am gwine to glory.
I fotch 'em fore miles on my head,
I am gwine to glory.
My chile is sick, an' husban' dead,
I am gwine to glory.
Now's de time to get 'em cheap,
I am gwine to glory.
Eat 'em wid yer bread an' meat,
I am gwine to glory.
Come sinner get down on your knees,
I am gwine to glory.
Eat dees strawberries when you please,
I am gwine to glory."

Upon the whole, the colored man of Virginia is a very favorable physical specimen of his race; and he has peculiarly fine, urbane manners. A stranger judging from the surface of life here, would undoubtedly say that they were a happy, well-to-do people. Perhaps, also, he might say: "Ah, I see. The negro is the same everywhere—a hewer of wood, a peddler of vegetables, a wearer of the waiter's white apron. Freedom has not altered his status."

Such a judgment would be a very hasty one. Nations are not educated in twenty years. There are certain white men who naturally gravitate

also to these positions; and we must remember that it is only the present generation of negroes who have been able to appropriate any share of the nobler blessings of freedom. But the colored boys and girls of Virginia are to-day vastly different from what the colored boys and girls of fifteen or twenty years ago were. The advancement and improvement is so great that it is not unreasonable to predict from it a very satisfactory future.

The negro population here are greatly in the majority, and formerly sent a member of their own color to the State Senate, but through bribery and ballot-box stuffing, a white Senator is now in Richmond. One negro here at a late election sold his vote for a barrel of sugar. After he had voted and taken his sugar home, he found it to be a barrel of sand. I learn that his neighbors turned the laugh upon him, and made him treat the whole company, which cost him five dollars.

I would not have it supposed from what I have said about the general condition of the blacks in Virginia that there are none of a higher grade. Far from it, for some of the best mechanics in the State are colored men. In Richmond and Petersburg they have stores and carry on considerable trade, both with the whites and their own race. They are doing a great deal for education; many send their sons and daughters North and West for better advantages; and they are building some of the finest churches in this State. The Second Baptist Church here pulled down a comparatively new and fine structure, last year, to replace it with a more splendid place of worship, simply because a rival church of the same denomination had surpassed them. I viewed the new edifice, and feel confident it will compare favorably with any church on the Back Bay, Boston.[29]

The new building will seat three thousand persons, and will cost, exclusive of the ground, one hundred thousand dollars, all the brick and wood work of which is being done by colored men.

29. Back Bay was a fashionable new neighborhood of Boston recently created from landfill. It became the site of the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts later in the nineteenth century.

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That point made, the amount of information about Brown, his works, and his world is ample. Given the breadth of his output, his range of contacts, and his experience, the interested reader can find a wealth of information and analysis in print. The following list gives only a small selection of the printed books about him and his works, his nearest contemporaries, and his world. It is divided into three parts: his published works, the published works in related genres by his African American peers, and a wide variety of secondary sources.

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